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Adapting to Change in Contemporary Irish and Scottish Culture:  
Fiction to Film

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Department of English Literature  
and Department of Film and Television Studies

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# Abstract

The recent establishment of the Research Institute in Irish and Scottish Studies (RIISS) at the University of Aberdeen heralds an increased enthusiasm for research concerning Scotland and Ireland, and is evidence of a general acceptance and validation of the conjoined nature of Irish-Scottish studies. This thesis, drawing on the interdisciplinary nature of this new area, examines the relationship of Irish and Scottish literature and film comparatively. The field of adaptation has traditionally centred around classical literary adaptations and the heritage film. Considering the increasing frequency with which contemporary novelists are adapted to film, it comes as a surprise that very little analysis has extended beyond the pages of the general media. Recent Irish and Scottish films in particular have relied upon the popularity of their literary exports in order to boost their indigenous filmmaking ventures.

While generally considering the dialogic relationship between the publishing, film and television industries, this thesis specifically focuses on the adaptations of novels and short stories by Irish and Scottish writers from the 1980s to the present day. Part one, focusing on the work of Irish authors, looks at Bernard MacLaverty's *Cal* (Pat O'Connor, 1984) and *Lamb* (Colin Gregg, 1985); Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* (Neil Jordan, 1997); Roddy Doyle's *The Barrytown Trilogy*, comprising *The Commitments* (Alan Parker, 1991), *The Snapper* (Stephen Frears, 1993) and *The Van* (Stephen Frears, 1996); and Christy Brown's *My Left Foot* (Jim Sheridan, 1989). Part two examines the adaptations of Scottish writers, including Christopher Rush's *Venus Peter* (Ian Sellar, 1990); William McIlvanney's *The Big Man* (David Leland, 1990) and *Dreaming* (Mike Alexander, 1990); Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996); and Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar* (Lynne Ramsay, 2002). Rather than carefully consider the fidelity of the translation from page to screen, this study examines the cultural circulation of the texts in alternate media in relation to

their adaptive strategies. The novel's role in representing 'Irishness' and 'Scottishness' versus the adapted film's mode of representation is also considered alongside the influence of the director in contrast to the author, in order to reveal all of the contributing components to the development of a national cinema out of a national literature, both key components of a national culture.



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You're right, you're right, shure there's nothing like th'oul French film, lovely stuff it is [...] For years they have been talking on the upper-class well-bred-lines about der film als kunst, this Hollywood thing is well I mean to say it is all right if you like that sort of thing but it's vulgar, old boy, it's vulgar, it's not Awrt. [...] Yes. But the film is a great industry: it does not have to apologise to the unwashed uneducated artistic classes, the madolescents and peterpanjandrums for not being an art.[...] There is no reason in the world why a film should be addressed to a small clique; each film gives employment to armies of technical, sales and publicity people before it gets to the public and if it does that it must be better than the flickering fiddling avant-garde releases.  
(Flann O'Brien)<sup>1</sup>

We're not Scottish we're Northern European and highly industrialised, developed westerners. Whatever is uniquely Scottish about us would be so difficult to put across in such a crass medium as film that it's not worth the attempt.  
(Bill Forsyth)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Flann O'Brien, 'The Plain People of Ireland', *The Best of Myles* (London: Picador, 1977), pp. 79-111: 94.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Hunter, 'Bill Forsyth: The Imperfect Anarchist', Eddie Dick (ed.), *From Limelight to Satellite: A Scottish Film Book* (London and Glasgow: BFI and SFC, 1990), pp. 151-162: 161.

## Introduction

In February 1996, the simultaneous UK release of *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996) and a new adaptation of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (Ang Lee, 1995) provoked debate in the British press around an unlikely comparison. Martin Wroe in *The Observer* described the occurrence as neatly pinpointing the 'sensibilities of the nation' by divvying up the films' spectators into 'Trainspotters' and 'Janespotters'.<sup>3</sup> We were to assume, at that particular moment, that Britain was divided into two cinematic groups. This neat categorisation forged interesting connections and ignited further analysis in academic criticism.

John Caughie and Kevin Rockett also remark upon the importance of this event in their opening to *The Companion to British and Irish Cinema*. Citing *The Guardian* critic Derek Malcolm, who also stressed the incompatibility of the two films by declaring it 'perverse to like both *Trainspotting* and *Sense and Sensibility*', Caughie and Rockett frame their work within a changing climate and detail a growing 'complexity, diversity and cultural hybridity' in British, but also Irish cinema of the moment.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, *Trainspotting*, when vying against what was essentially a heritage film and a more familiar depiction of 'Britain', proves illustrative of the changing and more fluid representations challenging the dominant mode. As Andrew Higson has explained, in cinema this mode has generally

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Wroe, 'Hard Drugs and Heroine Addiction', *Observer*, 10 March 1996, p. 13. Cited in Derek Paget, 'Speaking Out: The Transformations of *Trainspotting*', in Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (eds.), *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 128-140: 128.

<sup>4</sup> John Caughie and Kevin Rockett, *The Companion to British and Irish Cinema*, (London: BFI, 1996), p. ix.

proved exclusive in its representations of 'Britain', showcasing 'Englishness rather than Britishness'.<sup>5</sup>

The two films' simultaneous release further illustrates the significant challenge *Trainspotting* proffered pre-existing cinematic representations. Martin Wroe, highlighting the two films' divergence in representation, remarks that 'one is about insensible smackheads in Edinburgh, the other about sensible bonnet-heads in middle England'.<sup>6</sup> Wroe's critique focusing on the films' differences may also be conversely read to signify their common ground. Both succinct representations – smackheads and bonnet-heads – serve as ostensibly 'authentic' depictions of particular communities. However, *Sense and Sensibility* matched previous representations in 'British' cinema in its depiction of a particular England whereas *Trainspotting* seemed unfamiliar territory because it was a representation of 'Britishness' (and 'Scottishness') that had yet to be encountered on screen. While both films may signify a new diversity in the range of films being produced, such diversity does not always ensure a complexity of representation within the films themselves, or even in their reception and interpretation. Furthermore, the attitudes of the newspaper critics at the time of the films' release suggest a divergence in audience tastes. The two groups identified by critics could be seen as predominantly divided by age group, but are even more tellingly marked by class distinctions. However, as some critics admitted, what problematised the readings of the films' reception was their largely shared audience.

Evidence of this blurring of genres is also found in the crossover of several actors. Before her association with Jane Austen, Emma Thompson appeared in John Byrne's very Scottish take on the 1980s – a *Trainspotting* for the commuter generation - *Tutti Frutti* (Tony

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<sup>5</sup> Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 26.

<sup>6</sup> Wroe, 'Hard Drugs and Heroine Addiction', p. 13.

Smith, 1987), the BBC television series charting the progress of a rock band on tour. And a few months after achieving his notoriety in *Trainspotting*, Ewan McGregor could be seen in *Emma* (Douglas McGrath, 1996). MacGregor would appear years later in another period drama with literary roots, as James Joyce in *Nora* (Pat Murphy, 2000). The ease with which spectators and the producers of film move across generic boundaries is clear and leaves one with the feeling that it is solely the critics that experience difficulty in digesting this interchangeability. Perhaps the difficulty found in synthesizing the crossover appeal of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Trainspotting* is really down to issues of class.

Andrew Higson has characterised the heritage film as a 'carrier of middle-class quality products' in limbo between 'arthouse and mainstream, low budget and independent' and bearing a significant impact on issues of authorship. The aesthetic qualities of the heritage film, Higson points out, are marked by medium shots, long takes and a style he links to the 'cinema of attractions' of early filmmaking explored at great length by Tom Gunning.<sup>7</sup> Gunning's description of the 'cinema of attractions' as expressing the 'ability to *show* something'<sup>8</sup> places the emphasis on the cinema's capacity to communicate in the fine 'details' within the frame. In the heritage film, a similar preoccupation with detail becomes a primary source of pleasure and the spectacle of the 'authenticity' of rich period detail parallels the pleasure of the carnivalesque spectacle of the early cinematic exhibitions and their similar obsession with recreating the sensations of even the most commonplace experiences in great detail.<sup>9</sup> Only in the heritage film it is the embodiment of a particular national past that is put on display – more *Antiques Roadshow* than carnivalesque. John

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<sup>7</sup> Andrew Higson, 'The Heritage Film and British Cinema', in Andrew Higson (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema* (London and New York: Cassell, 1996), pp. 232-249: 234.

<sup>8</sup> Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde', *Wide Angle*, vol. 8, no. 3/4, 1983, pp. 63-70: 64.

<sup>9</sup> In his essay, Tom Gunning illustrates the importance of 'authenticity' of experience in early cinema by pointing to theatres which used the films as starting points to developing an entire event, to which the exhibitors would add their own sound effects, arrange seating appropriate for a particular film, and sometimes even include simulated smells.

Caughie describes this form of representation as one in which 'the national past is captured like a butterfly on a pin in a museum of gleaming spires, tennis on the lawn, and the faded memory of empire'.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, *Trainspotting*'s careful flavouring of the local and general reliance on the evocation of a specificity of place might also be said to resemble Caughie's metaphor for the heritage film. But rather than a taxidermy of a national past and the preservation of an 'empire', the dedication to the particular in its on-screen detail reflects the multiple and changing cultures for which it secures visibility.

It seems remarkable that the link between heritage cinema and the 'cinema of attractions' that Higson suggests is inadvertently picked up by Sarah Street in her analysis of *Trainspotting*.<sup>11</sup> A shared connection to the 'cinema of attractions' may signal the way in which the heritage film and a film like *Trainspotting* may not be so far apart. Derek Malcolm's affinity for both *Trainspotting* and *Sense and Sensibility* highlights several inconsistencies. The role of the heritage film as defined by Higson, as a carrier of middle-class values, seems altogether incompatible with *Trainspotting*'s alignment staunchly outside, and seemingly against, the middle-class. Nevertheless, it is perhaps telling that *Sense and Sensibility*, although adapted by British actress Emma Thompson, was essentially an American film, produced by Columbia pictures, and may belie a notion of Britishness, promoted and exported outside Britain. Although *Trainspotting* gained cinematic success equal to its heritage rival, tellingly it was *Sense and Sensibility* that took home the Oscar for best-adapted screenplay, and *Trainspotting* which was awarded the BAFTA in the same category.

In many ways, *Trainspotting* did not prove altogether unique or different. Released around the time the notion of a 'Cool Britannia' was brewing, the film serves a similar function to

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<sup>10</sup> John Caughie, 'Small Pleasures: Adaptation and the Past in British Film and Television', *Ilha Do Desterro*, no. 32, 1997, pp. 27-50: 31.

<sup>11</sup> Sarah Street, 'Trainspotting' in Jill Forbes and Sarah Street (eds.), *European Cinema: An Introduction* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 182-192: 189-190.



heritage film and its promotion of Britain, but in the spirit of a post-national cinema, and in line with Tony Blair's new vision of Britain. Instead of being read as counter to the culture of the heritage film, *Trainspotting* may be seen to share similarities with the world embodied by the genre. The film's own cultural positioning could be read in the same way that Cairns Craig critiques its characters. He writes: 'Welsh's addicts and pushers and users are the mirror image of the free market capitalism which they believe themselves to have refused.'<sup>12</sup> Irvine Welsh picks up on this notion of the *Trainspotting* phenomena aligning itself with the culture it criticises when he describes its transition from being his book, then Danny Boyle's film, and later Ewan MacGregor's film, until finally having 'gone beyond that. When people say *Trainspotting* they think of Richard Branson.'<sup>13</sup> In short, it has become part of the British Industry. Similar to the heritage industry, the new British youth culture has its own brand of consumerist culture. Like its own characters who inevitably come to stand for the very thing they pit themselves against, *Trainspotting*, the film, becomes the mirror image of literary adaptations - like *Sense and Sensibility* - that it is seemingly reacting against, or in response to.

Claire Monk has noted this transition, involving films such as *Trainspotting*, but also *Brassed Off* and *The Full Monty*, as part of the culture's 'wider "re-branding" of Britain taking place in the late 1990s, both at home and for the benefit of export markets'.<sup>14</sup> Like the heritage film, the new British cinema of the 1990s projected itself alongside a fresh national image. Instead of the fetish-like promotion of rural landscapes prevalent in heritage cinema, the new films sold the cityscapes with a similar degree of sentimentality. Christopher Harvie has railed against *Trainspotting* in particular for moving 'between

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<sup>12</sup> Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 97.

<sup>13</sup> Steve Redhead, *Repetitive Beat Generation* (Edinburgh: Rebel Inc, 2000), p. 140.

<sup>14</sup> Claire Monk, 'Underbelly UK: The 1990s Underclass Film, Masculinity and the Ideologies of "New" Britain' in Justine Ashbey and Andrew Higson (eds.), *British Cinema, Past and Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 274-287: 276.

obscurity and violence and a clogged sentimentality of sociological sententiousness like Burns at his raised-pinkie worst'.<sup>15</sup> What Harvie's somewhat reductive criticism of *Trainspotting* might suggest in light of Monk's analysis, is the failure of the new films of the 1990s, despite efforts to combat notions of national identity inherent in heritage cinema, to offer a new view of Britain that does not simply repeat the fetishised, or sentimentalised view adopted in heritage cinema.

What is interesting about these aesthetically different, but objectively similar films, is their reliance on British literature for cinematic source material. This is not to suggest that many similarities exist between the literature of the heritage cinema and Welsh's own (although several critics have attempted to bridge the gap with various puns and tropes such as 'Janespotting' and the play on heroin[e]). Rather, the promotion of a 'national' literature, like the heritage film's investment in landscapes, British cities and the countryside, also serves to promote a national identity. *Trainspotting* reflects the attempts of British television to break its pact with costume drama and the audience's knee-jerk associations with 'classic' literature.<sup>16</sup> In a world-market dominated by Hollywood, British cinema, often hindered by the fact that its language is the same, has created its own place in the industry through literary adaptation, costume drama, and heritage film. Although recent films of the 1990s represented a broadening in representations of 'Britishness,' there remains a focus on literary culture as a marker of national identity. This tenet of British identity is superbly illustrated in *The Madness of King George* (Nicholas Hytner, 1995), when the king's familiarity with literature becomes a marker of his sanity as he is judged by his ability to eloquently perform Shakespeare. Likewise, cinema seems to summon

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<sup>15</sup> Christopher Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 177.

<sup>16</sup> Although social realist representation was already – at least since the 1950s and 60s – a well established tradition in British film and television, and could be argued to continually proffer counter-representations to heritage cinema, *Trainspotting* challenged these films in a rather different way – a divergence I will further elaborate on in the chapter wholly dedicated to the film.

literature in order to legitimise its own 'common sense'. Referencing Shakespeare, as well as other texts of high cultural value, British cinema has often been accused of relying on the success of one cultural export to elevate another. However, the joke in *The Madness of King George* comes when it is revealed that the king's psychiatrist, his audience and the judge of his sanity, has never read Shakespeare himself. And by the same token, cinema delivers its adaptations to audiences unaware of literary sources or influences.

Even if literary adaptation proves a somewhat cursory marker of Britishness, it is no doubt an integral component of British cinema. When film is not directly sourcing literature, it always has one eye on the literary. Regardless of its criticism, British cinema's dependence on literature is highly valued alongside its close relationship with the heritage film industry. In defence of this cycle of films, John Orr has argued: 'As opposed to those critics who regard "heritage" as sclerotic, an offence to "pure cinema", an uncomfortable truth offers itself. The adaptation may well be the worst of times, but it is also the best of times. If it is a weakness of British cinema, it is also an incontestable strength.'<sup>17</sup> Its strength undoubtedly lies in its ability to strategically position itself within the global market. Costume drama, literary adaptation, and heritage film all have played crucial roles in the promotion of the tourist industry. Brian McFarlane has criticised the BBC serial drama's assembly line production style, describing it as the work of a 'bricklayer rather than an architect',<sup>18</sup> perhaps pointing to the texts' somewhat mechanical role within the heritage industry. Even adaptations of recent fiction have become commercial commodities. In an article claiming that 'never before, it seems, has the novel been so important to the UK film industry', Leon Forde cites David Barron, the executive producer of the adaptation of AS Byatt's *Possession* (Neil LaBute, 2002), admitting that 'You're one

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<sup>17</sup> John Orr, 'Beyond Heritage: 1990s England and the Cinematic Novel', *Film West*, vol. 39, 2000, [www.iol.ie/~galfilm/filmwest/39heritage.htm](http://www.iol.ie/~galfilm/filmwest/39heritage.htm).

<sup>18</sup> Brian McFarlane, 'It Wasn't Like That In the Book', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2000, pp. 163-169: 166.

step nearer to a sure thing if you are starting with a good idea.'<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the importance of the literary adaptation in Britain is just as much evidence of Britain's valuing of its literary heritage, as it is proof of the ease of a particular text's adaptation.

In many ways the development of heritage cinema allowed for British cinema to develop globally, but this was tied to a failure to represent a comprehensive Britain, or even a contemporary one. Instead, national identity is relegated to the inanimate butterfly on the pin – rather than living and breathing, its dead status ensures an ease of undisputed representation. *Trainspotting*, like many films of the 1990s, may be seen as an attempt to break away from the contemporary narrative strategies of British television. Channel 4's involvement in developing new film talent and commitment to producing new films was to change British cinema. In his exploration of the channel's influence, John Caughie claims the success of British cinema to be 'almost entirely dependent on the convergence of film and television'.<sup>20</sup> *Trainspotting*'s success, largely due to the financing of Channel 4, ensured that this would be continued in the future and alternative ways of exporting British cinema would be considered outside the realm of the traditional heritage cinema. Paradoxically, the success of such films has contributed to the popularity of literary adaptations. Caughie has noted that, in addition to the 1980s, the 1990s are defined by 'representations of a classic literature in which irony and wit are rendered as English quaintness'.<sup>21</sup> Not quite the heterogeneous turn in British film-making remarked upon by Higson, it must be considered that both cinematic forms, the literary adaptation and more contemporary representations, may carry a similar agenda and might even have an equal hand in the 're-branding' of Britain to which Monk refers. Even while British television continues its commitment to literary classics, there are concerted attempts by British

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<sup>19</sup> Leon Forde, 'Crash Course in English Literature', *Screen International*, 16 February 2001, p. 33.

<sup>20</sup> Caughie, 'Small Pleasures', p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> Caughie, 'Small Pleasures', p. 31.

television to break away from previous 'heritage' representations and offer new forms of programming. Not only have the effects of television-funded cinematic efforts been felt in the film industry, but this has extended to television's programming, looking to more contemporary novels as dramatic sources, or even updating classic texts to contemporary settings.<sup>22</sup> Often, these serial adaptations resemble their predecessors in their dedication to representing the period in detail, even if contemporary. There remains a commitment to varying forms of authenticity - the authenticity of the text, the authenticity of the place, and the authenticity of the moment.

Even if *Trainspotting* is accepted as diverging from the 'heritage' representation of Britain, it is not accurate to suggest it was a form entirely new to film and literature. Like so many contemporary films (in Britain as well as Ireland), their ties to literary sources link them with various cultural contexts. With respect to *Trainspotting*, Claire Monk pointed out that the new 'youth underclass films' developing in the 90s 'in some cases extended the 1980s anti-realist trend'. Monk goes on to note *Trainspotting*'s employment of surrealism to portray the grim circumstances of characters' lives.<sup>23</sup> We may see this as an extension of previous cinematic representations and the film's intertextual relations with many media, but again, it is important to remember its source, and its own continuation from other literary forms. For instance, one might look at how Welsh's work is situated in relation to the work of other contemporary Scottish writers, for example, James Kelman. Welsh, who has expressed an admiration for Glasgow writers such as Kelman and Alasdair Gray, also admits that he was 'writing against them as well'.<sup>24</sup> Even if Kelman is rarely praised for his 'anti-realist' portraits, his work, like that of Gray's and others', is emblematic of

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<sup>22</sup> For example, television dramas such as *Take a Girl Like You* (BBC, 2000), *Rebus* (ITV, 2000), *White Teeth* (Ch 4, 2002), and *Tipping the Velvet* (BBC, 2002). ITV has also begun their production of a series of Shakespeare adaptations recast in contemporary settings, their first instalment being an update of *Othello* (2002) to the racial tensions of a corrupt London Metropolitan Police force.

<sup>23</sup> Monk, 'Underbelly UK', p. 276.

<sup>24</sup> Redhead, *Repetitive Beat Generation*, p. 139.

contemporary Scottish (but also Irish) literature's growing concern with representing many facets of 'the real': physical, psychological and imagined. In many cases, as it is illustrated by several texts throughout this study, this preoccupation with the 'real' is expressed in a 'surrealist' style.

The association of seemingly dedicated realist texts with surrealism is hardly a surprise when the notion of surrealism is fully considered. Rather than opposing realism, surrealism reflects an intensification of the real. In *What is Surrealism?* André Breton identifies it as articulating 'a desire to deepen the foundations of the real, to bring about an ever clearer and at the same time ever more passionate consciousness of the world perceived by the senses'. He later offers a definition: 'Pure psychic automatism, by which it is intended to express, verbally, in writing, or by other means, the real process of thought. Thought's dictation, in the absence of all control exercised by the reason and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations.'<sup>25</sup> What is interesting about Breton's definition is its connection to contemporary concerns of writers with truthfully representing the world around them. While James Kelman's commitment to the unaltered 'real' might, at first glance, seem to exclude him from the school of surrealism, his deliveries of unmediated narration, in which characters are allowed to speak for themselves, share the ambition to exorcise narratives of a 'moral' authoritative control. This freedom is what allows the narratives to generate fresh representations outside the confines and control of criticism.

The criticism surrounding *Trainspotting* and its efforts to assimilate the film into the framework of 'British' cinema might seem to usurp this control by circumscribing the text within a particular agenda. What the lengthy analysis of *Trainspotting* has revealed is a complex and problematic relationship to British cinema and Britain in general that is shared by several texts examined in the chapters that follow. However, each film and

cinematic tradition bears its own unique relationship to British cinema. The study is of Irish and Scottish cinematic traditions, and although the intention is to employ comparative strategies, their differences matter as much as their similarities. I will tentatively refer to an 'Irish cinema' or 'Scottish cinema' throughout the thesis. Although debates continue as to whether or not these industries exist, or ever did, I use the terms loosely to refer to bodies of films that were either produced within the respective countries, or involve them as their subject matter. The number of 'Irish' films discussed throughout this thesis produced in conjunction with British television or made by 'British' artists suggest that these films also confront notions of Britishness, regardless of their content. This consideration is doubly essential because of the tendency of studies of British cinema to shift attention to Scottish or Irish films (and Welsh for that matter) to the margins.<sup>26</sup> In his recent, and perhaps more realistically titled book (*English Heritage, English Cinema*), renegotiating his concept of 'British heritage' cinema, Andrew Higson admits the importance of the examination of Irish, Scottish and Welsh heritage, but maintains he must leave these out because of the necessity to 'draw boundaries somewhere'.<sup>27</sup> This is the reality of several studies of 'British' cinema. 'Britishness' is particularly problematic if what one is comparing is Scottish and Irish cinema. For these reasons, such comparisons and the films' relation to the 'national' become unavoidable. Particularly when considering adaptations of the novel, a form traditionally considered to be a dominant carrier of national identity,<sup>28</sup> the representation of the 'national' moves to the forefront. Although this study aims to consider the ways in which recent adaptations impinge upon British cinema,

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<sup>25</sup> André Breton, *What is Surrealism?* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), pp. 49 & 59.

<sup>26</sup> Martin McLoone is presently working on a comparative study of Irish, Scottish, and Welsh cinema. This study most likely develops from his essay 'Internal Decolonisation? British Cinema in the Celtic Fringe' published in the second edition of Robert Murphy's *The British Cinema Book* (London: BFI, 2001), pp. 184-190.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama Since 1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2003), p. 4.

it is necessary to accept the limitations of centring all analysis on this relationship. While the grouping of Irish cinema with British proves problematic, the thesis' focus on specifically Scottish and Irish adaptations aims to examine comparatively this relationship and the development of independent national cinemas.

### *Narrating the National*

Predominantly, the novel has been cited as the chief carrier of national identity. Benedict Anderson named the novel and the newspaper as providing the 'technical means' for representing 'The Nation' which he defined as 'an imagined political community'.<sup>29</sup> Others have widened their definition to 'Literature', allowing poetry, short-stories, and drama to be included. Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull point to the educational philosophies of John Anderson, who argued that, like education, literature was also a reflection of its producer, as 'an embodiment of culture'.<sup>30</sup> According to Roderick Watson, 'the main state left to a stateless nation may well be its state of mind, and in that territory, it is literature which maps the land'.<sup>31</sup> In Ireland, Seamus Deane has also stressed the cultural importance of literature, claiming 'If Englishness or Irishness were to be sought, literature would provide it'.<sup>32</sup> Although oral literary tradition is shared by both Scotland and Ireland and their cultural renaissances were developed on the back of literature, the divergence in the type of literature which prevailed (poetry in Scotland and drama in Ireland) perhaps informed very different future developments within their national literatures.

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<sup>28</sup> In *The Modern Scottish Novel* Cairns Craig argues that 'The development of the novel is profoundly linked to the development of the modern nation' (p. 9).

<sup>29</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), p. 25 and p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> John Anderson, *Education and Inquiry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980) as quoted in Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull, *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture: Inferiorism and the Intellectuals* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989), p. 85.

<sup>31</sup> Roderick Watson, 'Maps of Desire: Scottish Literature in the Twentieth Century', in T.M. Devine and R.J. Finlay (eds.), *Scotland in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), pp. 285-305: 285.



Other media have also proved successful carriers of national identity.<sup>33</sup> Andrew Higson argues the case for cinema as a carrier of the national, 'as one that draws on indigenous cultural traditions, [and] one that invokes and explores the nation's cultural heritage'.<sup>34</sup> Certainly, cultural policy such as Scottish Screen's mission statement ('To establish Scotland as a major screen production centre and project our culture to the world.'<sup>35</sup>) reflects great faith in the ability of film to act as a transmitter of national identity. Others argue that such expressions are even more necessary as formative agents of a culture's identity. According to Luke Gibbons: 'Cultural identity ... does not pre-exist its representations or material expressions, but is in fact generated and transformed by them – whether they take the form of the mass media, literary genres such as the novel and drama, visual representations, or other cultural or symbolic practices.'<sup>36</sup> However problematic this assumption that any media determines a national identity, the influence of various art forms on culture – socially and politically – cannot be overlooked. The study of adaptation affords the opportunity to closely examine the variations in the transmission of national identity offered by each medium. Several recent studies have outlined the existence of national cinemas, and have argued for their promotion of and reflections on national identity- though not entirely without caution.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Seamus Deane (ed.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), vol. 2, p. xxii.

<sup>33</sup> Although this depends on who you are speaking to. Writer A. L. Kennedy makes her opinion of film's insignificance clear in her comments on *Braveheart*: 'But that was just a film. A very silly one which many of us find deeply embarrassing.' Here Kennedy implies that while it may be an 'embarrassment' it doesn't matter because it's not the 'Great Scottish Novel', it's only a film. From Cristie L. March, 'Interview with A.L. Kennedy', *Edinburgh Review*, no. 101, 1999, pp. 99-119: 112.

<sup>34</sup> Higson, 'The Instability of the National', p. 36.

<sup>35</sup> Scottish Screen *Annual Review*, 1998/99, p.1.

<sup>36</sup> Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture*, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> See Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to Dad's Army* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997); Sarah Street, *British National Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); Marilyn Reizbaum, 'Not a Crying Game: The Feminist Appeal: Nationalism, Feminism and the Contemporary Literatures of Scotland and Ireland', *Scotlands*, vol. 1, 1994, pp. 24-31; Manfred Malzahn, *Aspects of Identity: The Contemporary*

Although studies of Irish and Scottish literature, and Irish and Scottish cinema exist, a focus on their crossover, or the adaptations of either culture, has not thus far been executed. Yet several other studies examine adaptation in a national context. Thomas Deveny's overview of adaptation in Spain examines the political environment surrounding the production of the texts and cinema's preoccupation with the texts in the first place.<sup>38</sup> Graeme Turner's analysis of Australian adaptations takes the culture as its primary subject, and the suturing of the literature and film gap as its foremost goal.<sup>39</sup> Adaptation specialist Brian McFarlane has also completed a study on nine recent Australian adaptations, and begins the project with a useful introduction to adaptation.<sup>40</sup> Millicent Marcus examines the tension between the two forms in relation to Italian Cinema,<sup>41</sup> and Eric Rentshler's edited collection focuses on various films and their relationship to German literature.<sup>42</sup>

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*Scottish Novel (1978-1981) as National Self-Expression* (Frankfurt am Main, Bern: Verlag Peter Lang, 1984); Willy Maley, 'Review of *Transformations in Irish Culture; Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy; The Novel and the Nation: Studies in New Irish Fiction*', *Textual Practice*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1998, pp. 184-190; John Hill, 'British Cinema as National Cinema: Production, Audience and Representation', in Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book* (London: BFI, 1997), pp. 244-254; Andrew Higson, 'The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema', in Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (eds.), *Cinema and Nation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 63-74; Andrew Higson, 'The Instability of the National', in Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (eds.), *British Cinema, Past and Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 35-47; Higson, *Waving the Flag*; Susan Hayward, 'Framing National Cinemas', in Hjort and MacKenzie, *Cinema and Nation*, pp. 88-102; Andrew Higson, 'Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film', in Lester Friedman (ed.), *British Cinema and Thatcherism* (London: University College, 1993), pp. 109-129; Kevin Rockett, 'Irish Cinema: The National in the International', *Cineaste*, vol. 24, no. 2-3, 1999, pp. 23-25.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Deveny, *Contemporary Spanish Film From Fiction* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> Graeme Turner, *National Fictions: Literature, Film and the Construction of Australian Narratives* (St. Leonards NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1993).

<sup>40</sup> Brian McFarlane, *Words and Images: Australian Novels into Film* (Richmond, Victoria: Heinemann Publishers, 1983).

<sup>41</sup> Millicent Marcus, *Filmmaking by the Book: Italian Cinema and Literary Adaptation* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1993).

<sup>42</sup> Eric Rentschler (ed.), *German Film and Literature: Adaptations and Transformations* (New York: Methuen, 1986).

### *Celtic connections*

The examination of Scottish and Irish texts in relation to their English counterparts is not new. Robert Crawford, in *Devolving English Literature*, expressed irritation at the fact that Scottish Literature is 'constantly absorbed into English Literature or else exiled from it for special attention in a specialist area'.<sup>43</sup> In many ways the formation of the Irish-Scottish Academic Initiative in 1995 aimed to offset the 'Anglocentricity' of those studies that Crawford criticised for either expelling Scottish literature to the margins or overlooking it entirely. The project forges links through a shared understanding, perhaps in their historical relation to 'Britain', of a sense of dislocation from an imaginary centre resulting in a kind of schism in identity. In his study of Scottish literature early in the twentieth century, Gregory Smith describes this as 'a reflection of the contrasts which the Scot shows at every turn, in his political and ecclesiastical history, in his polemical restlessness, in his adaptability'.<sup>44</sup> This characterisation of a divided self is also evident in debates circulating around the representation of Ireland, where the depiction of a 'Celtic Jekyll and Hyde' has been readily identified as demonstrative of a shared concern with the instability of a national identity and the sense of a repressed colonial historical memory<sup>45</sup> which postcolonial readings aim to re-imagine the absence of (i.e. how identity might have expressed itself without the flattening effects of national homogenisation<sup>46</sup>).

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<sup>43</sup> Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 305.

<sup>44</sup> Gregory Smith, *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (London: Macmillan, 1919), p. 4. Another example of the 'divided' Scot was illustrated by Hugh MacDiarmid in his poem 'The Caledonian Antisyzygy' in which he wrestles with his own voice and the decision to write in English or Scots. See Michael Grieve and W.R. Aitken (eds.), *The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1985), vol. 2, p. 1052.

<sup>45</sup> Luke Gibbons, in his *Transformations in Irish Culture*, refers to Ireland as 'a First World country, but with a Third World memory' (p. 68). It might be interesting to recall Jimmy Rabbitte in the film version of *The Commitments* referring to Ireland as a third world country. When a dole officer points out that he has been claiming for two years, Rabbitte replies, 'We're a third world country – what can you do?'

<sup>46</sup> Kevin Barry, 'Critical Notes on Post-Colonial Aesthetics', in Sarah Briggs, Paul Hyland and Neil Sammells (eds.), *Reviewing Ireland: Essays and Interviews from Irish Studies Review* (Bath: Sulis, 1998), pp. 250-264: 251.

The application of postcolonial criticism to Irish literature has been met with some resistance, particularly because of its failure to acknowledge distinctions between Northern Ireland and the Republic, but also because Ireland is seen as a European culture not easily compared with India or other former colonies.<sup>47</sup> In cinema studies in general, a self-assured critical approach continues to tack on Ireland to volumes devoted to British cinema, which often relegate Scotland and Wales to a subheading (if indeed they are dealt with at all). In many instances this approach is carefully thought out and the criticism is accordingly balanced. In the poorest examples, the token offering of the suggested title or subheadings only further highlights the study's failure to offer its due consideration. This conflict serves also as a point of contention in this thesis. In addition to drawing comparisons between Irish and Scottish texts, I will bring together a range of texts from both Northern Ireland and the Republic. Like other comparative studies, such as Caughie and Rockett's *Companion to British and Irish Cinema*, I must carefully negotiate the risk of homogenisation.

Likewise, the formation of the Irish-Scottish Academic Initiative, involving several Universities such as Aberdeen University, Strathclyde University, Trinity College Dublin, and now Queen's University, Belfast, has not escaped criticism.<sup>48</sup> Originating in 1995, the project aims to promote research in the areas of Scottish and Irish studies in addition to developing new relations between the two. Irish and Scottish studies, it is said, are linked

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<sup>47</sup> Ellen-Raïssa Jackson and Willy Maley, 'Celtic Connections: Colonialism and Culture in Irish-Scottish Modernism', *Interventions: The International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2002, special issue on Postcolonial Studies and Transnational Resistance, edited by Elleke Boehmer and Bart Moore-Gilbert, pp. 67-78. Jackson and Maley cite Luke Gibbons, Marjorie Howes, David Lloyd, Gerry Smyth, and the Field Day project as key affiliates in the development of postcolonial readings of Ireland. Studies of Irish cinema have also been criticised for their failure to represent Protestant Northern Ireland. Brian McIlroy in *Shooting to Kill: Filmmaking and the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland* (Wiltshire: Flicks Books, 1998), challenges the exclusivity of previous studies and aims to restore some semblance of balance.

<sup>48</sup> The Irish Government gave £400,000 to Trinity College Dublin for the development of Irish-Scottish studies (this was the largest single award ever granted in the Humanities in Ireland). Aberdeen University's first UK postgraduate programme in Irish-Scottish studies also broke records by receiving the largest sum ever granted for the Humanities in Scotland (£870,000).

culturally through a 'common linguistic, ethnic, demographic and cultural heritage'.<sup>49</sup> But there is an equally demonstrative rejection of the critical coupling of Ireland and Scotland. As Ellen-Raïssa Jackson explains:

The challenge that postcolonialism presents to existing critical frameworks is matched by the reluctance of critics to read Scottish and Irish writing against and alongside one another. Whereas a strong urge to bring together cultural analyses of Scotland and Ireland has been shown in projects such as the Irish-Scottish Academic Initiative, the debate surrounding the New British History, and through suggestions in the work of Robert Crawford, Marilyn Reizbaum and Seamus Deane, an equally forceful rejection of this approach has surfaced in the work of Fintan O'Toole, Colin McArthur and others.<sup>50</sup>

Here, the condemnation of postcolonial readings and the resistance to reading Scotland and Ireland against one another converge. The refusal perhaps reflects the perception of such an approach in Ireland as 'Britain by the back door' and the fear of violent separatism. As Jackson further explains, although 'Scotland has received little attention from postcolonial critics, a few readings of Scottish history and Scottish writing in a colonial context have been offered, most notably by Craig Beveridge and Ron Turnbull, Robert Crawford and Willy Maley'.<sup>51</sup> In many respects, the opposition to the connection could be symptomatic of a general antipathy towards any nationalist agenda, and the Initiative's perceived connection with this agenda, but also a general antipathy to 'Pan-Celticism'. In Beveridge and Turnbull's influential study *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture*, the tendency to oppose a nationalist movement is exposed as denying the fact that Scotland is, or ever was, a nation. This insistence on denying Scotland national status is something which Beveridge and Turnbull relate to Franz Fanon's explanation of colonisation, ensuring that the colonised 'recognise the unreality of his "nation"'.<sup>52</sup> Certainly, this 'unreality' is to be seen as a side-

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<sup>49</sup> The AHRB Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies, 'About the Centre' [www.abdn.ac.uk/ahrbciiss/about](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/ahrbciiss/about).

<sup>50</sup> Jackson, 'Dislocating the Nation', pp. 121.

<sup>51</sup> Jackson, 'Dislocating the Nation', pp. 120-121.

<sup>52</sup> Beveridge and Turnbull, *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture*, p. 7. Similarly, Julie Watt writes of a dismissal of a Scottish 'past' in her article 'Beam Me Up, Scotty and Tales From the Edge', in Ian

effect in the literature and cinema of both Scotland and Ireland and is evident in several of the texts discussed in this thesis.

On the other hand, Beveridge and Turnbull seem to locate the 'authentic' foundations of a Scottish national identity in the rural, arguing that 'it is true that nationalists show some awareness that Scottish forms of life have been distorted or suppressed by the metropolitan culture, and that an effort of rescue and revival is required'. This revival they identify as including the study of Gaelic, Scottish literature, history, etc. All of which were placed in a higher profile in the curriculum and represented a concern they argue to have held a prominent position in the SNP manifesto on education, but one which is ultimately 'seriously limited' because the result 'would leave intact certain structures of the metropolitan culture, while failing to re-assert central aspects of Scottish culture'.<sup>53</sup>

Today's focus has shifted away from a rural-centred interpretation of Scotland's national identity to a more diverse vision accepting both the rural and the metropolitan in a revisioning of the plurality of new 'Scotlands'. Ireland shares this change. Gerry Smyth writes: 'it is perhaps no longer possible to offer a single artistic vision of the nation'.<sup>54</sup> Even considering this opening up of identities, and a move away from a sort of singular 'vision' for the nation, many writers and artists have voiced their discomfort with being categorized under a particular milieu.

In an interview, Janice Galloway warned of the 'mild feeding-frenzy that happened with Scottish writing' as risking 'being contained, gift-wrapped' or somehow limited and restricted by a too-narrow categorisation. She explained: 'Twentieth century consumerism is relentless. It got so the word "Scottish" started to mean this media-thing rather than

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Lockerbie (ed.), *Image and Identity: Theatre and Cinema in Scotland and Quebec* (Stirling: University of Stirling, The John Grierson Archive, 1998), pp. 100-108.

<sup>53</sup> Beveridge and Turnbull, *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture*, p. 62.

<sup>54</sup> Gerry Smyth, 'Roddy Doyle and the New Irish Fiction', *The Novel and the Nation: Studies in the New Irish Fiction* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), pp. 65-97: 67.

anything else.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Alan Warner has expressed his own distaste for the media circus surrounding the 'Chemical Generation' of writers: 'What bothered me about it is it was getting to be more about writers than the writing.'<sup>56</sup> This concern over the promotion of celebrity rather than substance is shared by contemporary filmmakers. Lynne Ramsay, like Warner, shares an uneasiness with her confinement in the category of Scottishness: 'Lots of people like to make comparisons [...] and put you in some kind of category. Oh, you're a Scottish filmmaker, you're a woman filmmaker, and it feels like I'm being marginalized.'<sup>57</sup> Although Ramsay's comments bring to light the harmful consequences of the media's insistence on labelling her work, engagement with issues of national identity are unavoidable – to critics, writers, directors, and any other artist for that matter. It would be impossible for an artist to divorce their work entirely from their own context, just as it is hard to imagine a nation's political climate to go unaffected by activity in its various art sectors.

In terms of the subject of this thesis, the formation of a National Cinema and the role of Scottish and Irish writers in this process generates additional comparisons.<sup>58</sup> In a report in the *Cineaste*, director/screenwriter Terry George expresses 'A Wish List for Irish Cinema'. Of the list of ten wishes, 'good scripts' makes its way into half of the entries, and is illustrative of the crucial part played by writers in the development of Irish cinema.<sup>59</sup> In Scotland too, there is a need for writers. Referring to the boom in the industry resulting

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<sup>55</sup> Cristie Leigh March, 'Interview with Janice Galloway', *Edinburgh Review*, no. 101, 1999, pp. 85-98: 92.

<sup>56</sup> Zoë Strachan, 'Existential Ecstasy', *Spike Magazine*, [www.spikemagazine.com/0300alanwarner.htm](http://www.spikemagazine.com/0300alanwarner.htm), n.pag.

<sup>57</sup> Neil Cooper, 'Perfect Vision', *Product*, Winter 2000, pp. 22-27: 26.

<sup>58</sup> It is worth remarking that while a National Theatre is a stated goal within Scottish Arts and Culture, a National Cinema is not. In any case, the promotion of a National *anything* proves problematic because of the tendency to associate the project with the political agenda of the SNP.

<sup>59</sup> Terry George in Gabriel Byrne, et al., 'Irish Cinema at the Crossroads: A Filmmakers' Symposium', *Cineaste*, vol. 24, no. 2-3, 1999, pp. 70-73: 71.

from the success of Bill Forsyth, director Gareth Wardell described the moment as an opportunity for writers, and 'a way of promoting novels and developing craft'.<sup>60</sup> The influence of novelists, and other fiction writers, has been felt in both Irish and Scottish cinema, and not only in terms of the themes and issues wrestled with in literature, being carried over to film. The mode in which the narrative is expressed has also informed the cinema.

In several of the texts addressed in this thesis one shared narrative mode is the voice-over. Like other adaptations of first person novels generally relying on the voice-over,<sup>61</sup> Irish and Scottish cinema has been characterised by its use. Differing from its fluid use characterised by traditional British/English heritage cinema, in which the articulate voice of a character serves to reinforce the detail of the camera in a similarly self-assured fashion, the voice-over in several of the films looked at here is marked by its fragmentation and often discordant relationship to the image. The voice, divided between cultural discourses, alternates between modes of articulation (often English, but more often American) and is representative of both cultures' concern with language and authority. This occurrence will be further explored throughout the thesis in relation to the cultures' shared negotiations with British and American cultural representations, but also identifications with European identities.

### *Scotland, literature and film*

In recent years, Scottish Cinema, seems to have established itself as a powerful player on the international market. So well has it fared, critically and commercially, that Eddie Dick's comment in 1990 that the appearance of Scottish Film on Higher English exams

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<sup>60</sup> Gareth Wardell, 'The Big Picture: Scotland's Film Industry', *Cencrastus*, no. 68, 2000, pp. 6-14: 10.

<sup>61</sup> Sarah Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers: Voice-Over Narration in American Fiction Film* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1988), p. 72.



sealed their fate as unpopular, educational cinema, seems well wide of the mark.<sup>62</sup> Some have argued that 'before "Shallow Grave" [Danny Boyle, 1994] and "Rob Roy" [Michael Caton-Jones, 1995], there were virtually no definable Scottish films for years, and no sense of local production culture or business'.<sup>63</sup> Today a clearly defined group of key figures has emerged.

Scottish Literature has always proved an invaluable source for cinema, providing material for films such as *Whisky Galore!* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1949),<sup>64</sup> *Laxdale Hall* (John Eldridge, 1952),<sup>65</sup> *Kidnapped* (Stevenson, Disney 1960),<sup>66</sup> *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*,<sup>67</sup> *The Body Snatcher* (Robert Wise, 1945),<sup>68</sup> *The Silver Darlings* (Clarence Elder and Clifford Evans, 1947),<sup>69</sup> *The Shipbuilders* (John Baxter, 1943),<sup>70</sup> *Sunset Song* (Moirra Armstrong, 1975),<sup>71</sup> *Thirty-Nine Steps*,<sup>72</sup> and *The Bridal Path* (Frank Launder, 1959).<sup>73</sup> Later Muriel Spark's work would provide material for several films including *Nasty Habits* (Michael

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<sup>62</sup> Dick (ed.), *From Limelight to Satellite*, p. 29.

<sup>63</sup> Adam Dawtrey, 'Pix Pique Contempo Scottish Arts Rebirth', *Variety*, 19-25 August 1996, p. 51.

<sup>64</sup> Sir Compton Mackenzie, *Whisky Galore* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1947).

<sup>65</sup> Eric Linklater, *Laxdale Hall: A Novel* (London: Cape, 1951).

<sup>66</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped* (London: Penguin, 1994).

<sup>67</sup> Several versions of Robert Louis Stevenson's tale have been filmed. Victor Fleming's version (1941) starring Spencer Tracy and Rouben Mamoulian's version (1931) are perhaps the most remarkable. Adapted from *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Other Stories* (London: Minster Classics, 1968).

<sup>68</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Wrong Box; The Body-Snatcher* (London: Heinemann, 1923).

<sup>69</sup> Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Darlings* (London: Faber, 1941).

<sup>70</sup> George Blake, *The Shipbuilders* (London: Faber, 1935).

<sup>71</sup> Lewis Grassie Gibbon, *Sunset Song: A Novel* (London: Jarrolds, 1932).

<sup>72</sup> Again several versions of this were made, most notably Alfred Hitchcock's *39 Steps* (1935). Adapted from John Buchan, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (London and New York: Longmans, Green and co., 1947).

<sup>73</sup> Nigel Tranter, *The Bridal Path* (London: Black & White Publishing, 2002).

Lindsay-Hogg, 1977),<sup>74</sup> *The Driver's Seat* (Giuseppe Patroni Griffi, 1974),<sup>75</sup> and, most notably, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Ronald Neame, 1969)<sup>76</sup> starring Maggie Smith as Jean Brodie. Spark's work also provided material for television: *Memento Mori* (Jack Clayton, 1992)<sup>77</sup> was adapted for television (again starring Maggie Smith), and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* was also made into a television series for STV in 1978. This list is not exhaustive. Many other films adapted from novels exist in addition to several other novels which were scripted but never made it to screen. Bill Douglas's project of *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*<sup>78</sup> is one example of adaptations that were never made.

Despite the popularity of Scottish Literature for its filmic potential, Forsyth Hardy, in *Scotland in Film*, condemns the production of adaptations in Scotland and asks: 'Had the film writers run out of ideas? Or did the film-makers want to improve on past failures?'<sup>79</sup> Hardy's comments suggest a lack of confidence in adapted material, arguing that a reliance on earlier sources signals a rootedness in the past and a commitment to a fixed, regressive image. Under Hardy's terms, only by severing ties with its literary past can Scottish filmmaking come to reflect new, more progressive versions of identity. Still, some of the most progressive filmmakers in Scotland have sworn by their literary inspirations. For example, Bill Forsyth is said to have 'stolen more inspiration from novels than from films'.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Adapted from Muriel Spark's novel *The Abbess of Crewe* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

<sup>75</sup> Muriel Spark, *The Driver's Seat* (London: Macmillan, 1970).

<sup>76</sup> Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (London: Macmillan, 1961).

<sup>77</sup> Muriel Spark, *Memento Mori* (London: Macmillan, 1959).

<sup>78</sup> James Hogg, *The Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (London: Panther, 1970).

<sup>79</sup> Forsyth Hardy, *Scotland in Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), p. 141.

<sup>80</sup> Alan Hunter, 'Bill Forsyth: The Imperfect Anarchist', in Dick, *From Limelight to Satellite*, pp. 151-162.

In tune with Hardy's condemnation of Scottish films' association with Scottish literature, Julie Watt suggests that several representations in Scottish cinema seem more reminiscent of the tartanry and kailyard traditions of Scottish Literature.<sup>81</sup> Watt asserts that 'nowadays, while the rest of the world gets on with the twentieth century, in our films Scotland continues to stand where she did...we just get all nostalgic about our past and fanciful about our present'.<sup>82</sup> Although this analysis could serve as a fair descriptor of various periods of indigenous filmmaking in Scotland, this article, published in 1998 fails to acknowledge the pioneering films of the 1990s and wrongly links its regressive interpretation of cinema with a literary past and its traditions, ignoring the cinema's connection to contemporary Scottish literature. In a similar vein, Ian Spring, in his essay in *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, doubts that 'the premier novels of the last twenty years have made a particularly notable contribution to the (limited) film and television production of this country'.<sup>83</sup> Although Spring is merely suspicious of the *impact* of literature on the last twenty years of filmmaking and is not downplaying the importance of developments in Scottish literature, his distinction inadvertently supports Watt's comments by suggesting that the films draw from traditions rooted in the past. These assumptions about literature and film traditions alike are misleading for several reasons. Firstly, it is crucial that the critics determine which 'regressive' texts they are pointing the finger at. Secondly, this critique assumes that film functions merely as an interlocutor rather than with a voice of its own, and ignores the many innovative films that have offered fresh rereadings of well-worn texts. But most of all these criticisms belie a sense of uneasiness

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<sup>81</sup> Although critics have identified various myths in the depictions of Scottish literature and film, tartanry and kailyard are consistently agreed upon as key. Tartanry typically invokes romantic highland myths involving clans, kilts, and most often bagpipes. Kailyard, or cabbage patch, is generally associated with the idea of a close-knit local village and the domestic. Another often cited myth, thought to have formed in response to Kailyard, is Clydesidism – or 'The Hardman' – which glorifies the strength of the working-class male.

<sup>82</sup> Julie Watt, 'Beam Me Up, Scotty', p.102.

with the past that overlooks a necessity to examine the past in order to understand one's future and instead bears the unconditional belief that progress is always tied to the present.

Duncan Petrie, on the other hand, expresses a more hopeful attitude towards the novel. Art cinema, he argues, comes closest to 'opening up the possibility of a distinctive Scottish "voice" comparable to a range of other forms of contemporary creative expression from the novel to the theater'.<sup>84</sup> The distinctive voice of the novel which Petrie speaks of, evident in the recent heightened success of Scottish literature, is also apparent in new cinematic successes. Hardly surprising, often these accomplishments are more closely related than one might think and are the result of one medium borrowing from the other. Rather than following Hardy's condemnation of Scottish filmmaker's 'dependence' and ignoring the output of the Scottish literary revival, contemporary filmmakers have chosen to draw from a rich body of published material.

Several contemporary writers have had their work adapted to film. Following the television adaptation of Iain Banks' *The Crow Road* (Gavin Miller, 1996) and the film adaptation of *Complicity* (Gavin Millar, 2000), more of his novels have been optioned, including *The Wasp Factory*, and *The Bridge*.<sup>85</sup> Banks has also been in the process of writing an original screenplay. Michael Caton-Jones tried his hand at adapting for television when he adapted Fredrick Lindsay's *Brond* (1987).<sup>86</sup> Jessie Kesson's *Another Time, Another Place* (Mike Radford, 1983)<sup>87</sup> was also a successful film. Several other

<sup>83</sup> Ian Spring, 'Image and Text: Fiction on Film', in Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (eds.), *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), pp. 206-216.

<sup>84</sup> Duncan Petrie, *Screening Scotland* (London: BFI, 2000), p. 168.

<sup>85</sup> Iain Banks, *The Crow Road* (London: Scribners, 1992); *Complicity* (London: Abacus, 1993); *The Wasp Factory* (London: Abacus, 1990); *The Bridge* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986).

<sup>86</sup> This was an adaptation of Lindsay's first novel for Channel 4. Frederic Lindsay, *Brond* (London: Corgi, 1984).

<sup>87</sup> Jessie Kesson, *Another Time, Another Place* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1983).

adaptations are in the pipeline including Alexander Trocchi's *Young Adam* (David Mackenzie, 2003)<sup>88</sup> starring Ewan McGregor, Tilda Swinton, Peter Mullan and Emily Mortimer. In theatre, John Byrne's *The Slab Boys* (1997)<sup>89</sup> was adapted to screen under the direction of the author himself. *Lanark*, Alasdair Gray's experimental, postmodernist work has been the subject of several attempts at adaptation, but due to budget problems it never quite made it off the ground.<sup>90</sup> Yet despite the failure for the novel to be realised in screen form, a successful version for stage was created in 1995. *The Fall of Kelvin Walker* was produced for television by the BBC in 1968.<sup>91</sup> Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things*, after several attempts, is currently in production and will mark the feature film debut of documentarist Sandy Johnson.<sup>92</sup> A.L. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad* is set to be adapted by Steve Hamilton-Shaw.<sup>93</sup> Toni Williamson's *Scar Culture* may also be made into a film.<sup>94</sup> In addition to the adaptation of literary texts, several writers are directly involved in film and television, and have produced original scripts for the media. A.L. Kennedy penned the original screenplay for the successful film *Stella Does Tricks* (Coky Giedroyc, 1997) and is currently in the process of writing a second series of the television drama *Dice* (HBO, 2001), which she has co-authored with John Burnside. Sharman MacDonald, Glasgow-born playwright and novelist, wrote an original script for a Channel 4 film, *Wild Flowers* (Robert Smith, 1989), and has had her play *The Winter Guest* (Alan Rickman, 1997) made into a film with Emma Thompson.

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<sup>88</sup> Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam* (Edinburgh: Rebel Inc., 1996).

<sup>89</sup> John Byrne, *The Slab Boys* (Edinburgh: Salamander Press, 1982).

<sup>90</sup> Alasdair Gray, *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* (London: Picador, 1985).

<sup>91</sup> Alasdair Gray, *The Fall of Kelvin Walker: A Fable of the Sixties* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1985).

<sup>92</sup> Alasdair Gray, *Poor Things* (London: Penguin Books, 1993).

<sup>93</sup> A.L. Kennedy, *So I Am Glad* (London: J. Cape, 1995).

<sup>94</sup> Toni Davidson, *Scar Culture* (Edinburgh: Rebel Inc., 1999).

Several short films have also used literature as their source material. Alasdair Gray's 'The Story of a Recluse' (1987) and 'The Star' (David Morre, 1996) have been adapted.<sup>95</sup> *The Acid House* (Paul McGuigan, 1998) was based on three short stories from Irvine Welsh's collection of the same name.<sup>96</sup> And a version of Des Dillon's *Duck* (Kenny Glenann, 1998) was filmed as part of the *Tartan Shorts* awards scheme, starring Peter Mullan.<sup>97</sup> Finally, several writers discussed in this thesis, including Christopher Rush, William McIlvanney, Irvine Welsh, and Alan Warner, have all made their mark in Scottish cinema.

Commenting on the absence of adaptations for so many novels, Douglas Gifford, Sarah Dunnigan, and Alan MacGillivray write: 'Clearly none of these would have enhanced in themselves either the tradition of the Scottish novel, or the recent development of a vibrant proto-Scottish film industry, but such adaptations might have added richness to the cultural awareness and sense of national self-identity which is so important to small nations.'<sup>98</sup> Hopefully, the promise of future adaptations will add to this 'richness' and help to offer fresh representations, posing new questions for Scottish cinema and culture.

### ***Ireland, literature and film***

Irish literature has also provided a rich resource for filmmakers. James Joyce has supplied the material for several films, including two by Joseph Strick, *Ulysses* (1967) and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1978), another adaptation by Mary Ellen Bute of *Finnegans Wake*, titled *Passages from Finnegans Wake* (1969), and most recently, John Huston's *The Dead* (1987).<sup>99</sup> Director Sean Walsh is presently involved in adapting

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<sup>95</sup> Alasdair Gray, 'The Story of a Recluse', *Lean Tales* (London: Cape, 1985), pp. 222-246; 'The Star', *Unlikely Stories, Mostly* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1983), pp. 1-4.

<sup>96</sup> Irvine Welsh, *The Acid House* (London: Vintage, 1995).

<sup>97</sup> Des Dillon, *Duck: A Novel* (Glendaruel: Argyll, 1998).

<sup>98</sup> Douglas Gifford, Sarah Dunnigan, and Alan MacGillivray (eds.), *Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), p. 995.

<sup>99</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: The Bodley Head); *Finnegans Wake* (London, Faber, 1975); 'The Dead' in *The Dubliners* (London: Penguin Books, 2000).

*Ulysses*. Samuel Beckett has also recently been proven first-rate cinematic material in the large project funded by RTE and Channel 4, adapting nineteen of his dramatic works to film.<sup>100</sup>

Yet despite the success of previous adaptations, some critics question the consequences of Irish cinema's reliance on Irish literature. Pat Collins' remarks that 'recent Irish cinema would almost be non-existent if not for the influence of writers and adaptations from short stories and novels'. Collins adds that 'One could almost be forgiven for thinking that in some ways this ad lib approach has hindered the development of cinematic development in Ireland.'<sup>101</sup> Like Forsyth Hardy's cautioning against Scottish cinema's reliance on Scottish literature, which he fears would bind the medium to the past and inhibit innovation, Collins' comments directed at recent Irish cinema offer an anecdote that assumes a far more simplified industry than that which exists in reality. Even if it were possible to disentangle literary and cinematic influences from one another, would this close a door on the previous, unwelcome forms and representations? The writer's involvement in cinema is no new occurrence. James Joyce was interested and influenced by the medium of film, just as film was influenced by Joyce, and other modernist writers. Collins' disappointment in the current representations on screen are not so easily off-loaded onto another medium. Often it is the convergence of forms and media that results in the greatest degrees of innovation. It seems ironic that the film which Martin McLoone cites as 'one of the most intensely cinematic of recent Irish films' is an adaptation of Sam Hannah Bell's *December*

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<sup>100</sup> Beckett also penned the original cinematic script for *Film* (Alan Schneider, 1965), a short film starring Buster Keaton, an experience which is said to have led him to ponder a permanent creative shift to working in the cinema.

<sup>101</sup> Pat Collins, 'Pat McCabe talks to Pat Collins', *Film West*, no. 20, 1995, [www.iol.ie/~galfilm/filmwest/33badfilm.htm](http://www.iol.ie/~galfilm/filmwest/33badfilm.htm).

*Bride* (Thaddeus O'Sullivan, 1990),<sup>102</sup> emanating from the very body of Irish literature that Collins would rather cinema in Ireland would turn a blind eye to.

Neil Jordan, who started writing fiction before his filmmaking career took off, has been largely influenced by literature, a fact evident from the many adaptations he has been involved in. Several of Jordan's films have been based on other texts. He has adapted Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair* (1999),<sup>103</sup> Bari Wood's *Doll's Eyes*,<sup>104</sup> filmed as *In Dreams* (1999), Anne Rice's *Interview with a Vampire* (1994),<sup>105</sup> Angela Carter's *The Company of Wolves* (1984),<sup>106</sup> and a film that will be a major focus of this thesis, the acclaimed adaptation of Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* (1997).<sup>107</sup> Jordan also directed *We're No Angels* (1989) for which David Mamet adapted the screenplay from Albert Husson's play, and was involved in co-writing *Mona Lisa* (1986) with David Leland.

Shane Connaughton has also worked across film and literature, having adapted his own novel, *The Run of the Country* (Peter Yates, 1995),<sup>108</sup> in addition to Christy Brown's *My Left Foot* (Jim Sheridan, 1989).<sup>109</sup> Another film adapted from non-fiction is Cathal Black's *Love and Rage* (1998), an adaptation of James Carney's *The Playboy and the Yellow Lady*.<sup>110</sup> Elizabeth Bowen's novels have proved a popular source on television and *The*

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<sup>102</sup> Sam Hanna Bell, *December Bride* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press Ltd, 1974).

<sup>103</sup> Graham Greene, *The End of the Affair* (London: Heinemann, 1959).

<sup>104</sup> Bari Wood, *Doll's Eyes* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1993).

<sup>105</sup> Anne Rice, *Interview with the Vampire* (London: Warner, 1995).

<sup>106</sup> Angela Carter, 'The Company of Wolves', *The Bloody Chamber* (London: Vintage, 1995), pp. 100-118.

<sup>107</sup> Patrick McCabe, *The Butcher Boy* (London: Picador, 1993). All further references to *The Butcher Boy* are to this edition.

<sup>108</sup> Shane Connaughton, *The Run of the Country* (London: St. Martin's, 1995).

<sup>109</sup> Christy Brown, *My Left Foot* (London: Minerva, 1990). All further references will be to this edition.

<sup>110</sup> James Carney, *The Playboy and the Yellow Lady* (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1986).



*Last September* (Deborah Warner, 2000) provided material for a feature film.<sup>111</sup> Edna O'Brien has also had her fiction adapted to film with *The Girl with the Green Eyes* (Desmond Davis, 1963).<sup>112</sup> Jennifer Johnston has had several novels adapted to film – most recently, *The Railway Station Man* (Michael Whyte, 1992).<sup>113</sup> Joyce Cary was another writer involved in film. In addition to the adaptation of his own novels *Mister Johnson* (Bruce Beresford, 1990)<sup>114</sup> and *The Horse's Mouth* (Ronald Neame, 1958),<sup>115</sup> his play 'Sweet Aloes' was made into the film *Give Me Your Heart* (Archie Mayo, 1936). Cary also scripted *Men Of Two Worlds* (Thorold Dickinson, 1946) and later wrote another screenplay for Dickinson, *Secret People* (1952), loosely based on Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. Contemporary Northern Irish novelist Colin Bateman has also earned a reputation as a writer for film and television. Most recently, he has adapted Marian Keyes' novel *Watermelon* (Kieron Walsh, 2002) for a co-production with Granada television and Samson Films.<sup>116</sup> In addition to scripting (and even once directing) original drama for television, he has had two novels adapted - *Crossmaheart* (Henry Herbert, 1999) and *Divorcing Jack* (David Caffrey, 1998) - and composed the original screenplay for the film *Jumpers* (Konrad Jay, 1997).<sup>117</sup> *Divorcing Jack* represented Belfast in a contemporary light, but rather than claiming to engage politically, the director is quick to point out 'the film is about Dan Starkey rather than Northern Ireland as a whole', and is 'done in such a

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<sup>111</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1960).

<sup>112</sup> Based on Edna O'Brien's *The Lonely Girl* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962).

<sup>113</sup> Jennifer Johnston, *The Railway Station Man* (London: Hamilton, 1984).

<sup>114</sup> Joyce Cary, *Mister Johnson* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962).

<sup>115</sup> Joyce Cary, *The Horse's Mouth* (London: Readers' Union, 1945).

<sup>116</sup> Marian Keyes, *Watermelon* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1995).

<sup>117</sup> Colin Bateman, *Crossmaheart* (London: Harper Collins, 1999); *Divorcing Jack* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1996). *Crossmaheart* was originally titled *Cycle of Violence* but was renamed as a tie-in for the film.

madcap way and it's not flying a flag for either side so it has to be taken in a lot of ways with a pinch of salt'.<sup>118</sup>

Other adaptations that engage with 'The Troubles' include Liam O'Flaherty's *The Informer* (John Ford, 1935).<sup>119</sup> Critics such as Brian McIlroy have condemned the film, a polarised depiction of the Troubles. American academic Joan Dean in her article 'Screening the IRA', points the blame at Hollywood cinema in particular which she feels ultimately serves the desires of 'the 45 million Americans who claim Irish ancestry'.<sup>120</sup> On the other hand, *In the Name of the Father* (1993), an adaptation of Gerry Conlon's autobiography *Proved Innocent*, by Irish director Jim Sheridan, was received with great critical acclaim for its faithfulness to the book's thoughtful portrait and its resistance to the general constraints of the crime genre.<sup>121</sup> Mark Evan's adaptation of Eoin McNamee's novel *Resurrection Man* (1998), focusing on violence in the 1970s, is cast within the gangster genre,<sup>122</sup> as is the adaptation of the popular American writer Tom Clancy, *Patriot Games* (Phillip Noyce, 1992).<sup>123</sup> Reaching beyond the 1970s, Pat O'Connor's *Fools of Fortune* (1990) is an adaptation of William Trevor's novel about Protestants in Ireland set during the War of Independence.<sup>124</sup> Finally, and most famous, is Carol Reed's *Odd Man Out* (1947).<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Joanne Hayden, 'The Only Way is Up: An Interview with David Caffrey', *Film West*, no. 34, 1998, <http://www.iol.ie/~galfilm/filmwest/34caff.htm>.

<sup>119</sup> Liam O'Flaherty, *The Informer* (London: New English Library, 1958).

<sup>120</sup> Joan Dean, 'Screening the IRA', *Film West*, no. 20, 1995, <http://www.iol.ie/~galfilm/filmwest/20ira.htm>.

<sup>121</sup> Gerry Conlon, *Proved Innocent* (London: Penguin, 1991).

<sup>122</sup> Eoin McNamee, *Resurrection Man* (London: Picador, 1994).

<sup>123</sup> Tom Clancy, *Patriot Games* (London: Collins, 1987).

<sup>124</sup> William Trevor, *Fools of Fortune* (London: Harmondsworth, 1983). O'Connor's *Ballroom of Romance* (1982) is an adaptation of Trevor's short story by the same name in *The Ballroom of Romance, and Other Stories* (London: Bodley Head, 1972).

<sup>125</sup> F.L. Green, *Odd Man Out* (London: Michael Joseph, 1945).

Short fiction has also proved a popular source for film material. Perhaps the most celebrated is the adaptation of Maurice Walsh's *The Green Rushes*, *The Quiet Man* (John Ford, 1952).<sup>126</sup> Orla Walsh's short film *The Visit* (1992) adapts Laurence McKeown's short story<sup>127</sup> and follows a young wife visiting her husband in prison in a documentary style. Cathal Black's feature film *Korea* (1995) is based on short story by John McGahern<sup>128</sup>, and Brendan Bourke's commended short *Fishing the Sloe-Black River* (1996) also has its origins in a short story by Colum McCann.<sup>129</sup>

The theatre has long played a significant role in Irish cinema; film versions of Abbey theatre productions formed the basis of much of Ardmore Studio's output. Several contemporary dramatists have also contributed to Irish cinema through the adaptation of their stage work for screen. Brian Friel, for instance, has had several plays made into films, including *Dancing at Lughnasa* (Pat O'Connor, 1998). Bob Quinn directed his own *Budawanny* or *Bishop's Story* (1995). Brendan Behan has had several plays and his autobiographical novel *The Borstal Boy* (Peter Sheridan, 2000) adapted.<sup>130</sup> Kirsten Sheridan's *Disco Pigs* (2001) was adapted from a successful stage version by its playwright, Enda Walsh, and achieved a similar success. Kirsten's father's adaptation of John Keane's play *The Field* (Jim Sheridan, 1990) taps into several key issues concerning Irish national cinema.

Like several adaptations of Irish writing (and also some Scottish), the adaptation of *The Field* from theatre into the medium of film throws up new perspectives from which to view

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<sup>126</sup> Maurice Walsh, *The Green Rushes* (London & Edinburgh: Chambers, 1935).

<sup>127</sup> McKeown, an ex-Maze prisoner who was on hunger strike for 70 days, wrote 'Her Majesty's Prison' or 'The Visit' for the prisoner's magazine he founded *An Glor Gafa/ The Captive Voice* (published from 1989-1999).

<sup>128</sup> John McGahern, 'Korea', *Nightlines* (London: Faber, 1970), pp. 22-46.

<sup>129</sup> Colum McCann, *Fishing the Sloe-Black River* (London: Phoenix, 1995).

<sup>130</sup> Brendan Behan, *The Borstal Boy* (London: Hutchinson, 1958).

the central story. In this instance, John Keane's story of an Irishman from England overstepping his boundaries by outbidding a local in the purchase of land is retold as the unwelcome machinations of an American 'outsider' – a device Fidelma Farley has cited as functioning 'not to present Ireland as a spectacle for foreign eyes but to present Ireland to the Irish themselves'.<sup>131</sup> Recast in a medium which has struggled to find its feet as an indigenous form within the global market, this film, as with many adaptations, self-consciously assesses the ironic gap between its original and adapted form and reveals the influences of Hollywood.

The adaptations of Roddy Doyle, Bernard MacLaverty and Patrick McCabe in particular portray this influence of American culture. Katie Moylan has discussed this trend in contemporary Irish cinema, comparing *The Butcher Boy* to *Eat the Peach* (Peter Ormond, 1986). A film dealing with Elvis as easily as Ireland, *Eat the Peach*, Moylan argues, was 'the first fully commercial indigenous Irish feature film, signalling a break from the conventions of Irish cinema, not least in its representation of the land'.<sup>132</sup> In these films, the references to American popular culture, even though emblematic of their real-life counterparts, are often employed to excess in order to subvert nostalgic representations. This we see occurring occasionally in Scottish cinema too, including several of the adaptations looked at in this thesis.

### ***Adaptation: the medium of film in relation to literature***

The study of adaptation is often said to have suffered at the hands of what critic Brian McFarlane has referred to as 'middle-class, middle-brow criticism'.<sup>133</sup> Falling victim to debates around fidelity, adaptations have been overlooked as products of their adapted

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<sup>131</sup> Fidelma Farley, *This Other Eden* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>132</sup> Katie Moylan, 'The Bog Standard: Re-Interpreting the Irish Landscape', *Film West*, no. 37, 1999, pp. 40-42: 41.

<sup>133</sup> Brian McFarlane, 'It Wasn't Like That In the Book', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2000, p. 163.

medium in favour of their assessment in comparison to their 'original' narrative form. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of studying adaptation, it is likely to encounter a disparity of opinion over the ways in which literary texts and filmic texts are approached. Literary critics might only value film adaptations as a mode of supplementing the understanding of the 'original' text, or one 'reading' among many, and ultimately relegate the film to a secondary status, putting the 'copy' of the 'original' in its place.

Colin MacCabe has expressed his own feelings that, considering the widening of the gulf between the language of many English literary classics and that which is spoken in the present day, film adaptations may represent the sole means by which to continue the circulation of canonical texts.<sup>134</sup> Other critics, perhaps in anticipation of the reality of such a situation, see any serious engagement with film versions as symptomatic of a loosening of the reins of English Literature as a discipline. Generally perceiving film as a threat, these critics are misled by their literal interpretation of Marshall McLuhan's observation that a new medium will greedily consume the content of the old medium it aims to replace. McLuhan himself sees 'content' as 'a juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind'.<sup>135</sup> The real prize for McLuhan lies in the qualities of the medium itself.

Taken to the opposite extreme, film critics may be all-too eager to turn a blind eye to the literary origins of a work, guarding the virtues of a 'Pure Cinema' and its need to prove itself as a unique medium. Around half of all films produced are adapted from another source, but little consideration is given to this fact or other possible intertextual relationships. Brian McFarlane has also questioned the 'adequacy of a training in literature for dealing with film and, from the other corner, the adequacy of a training in film for

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<sup>134</sup> Colin MacCabe, 'Lit-Crit Hits the Screen', *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 30 July 1999, p. 16.

<sup>135</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Ark, 1987), p.18.

dealing with literature'.<sup>136</sup> Balancing the two disciplines equally is impossible: one will always outweigh the other. One approach might be to jettison any consideration of the literary source. Another is to foreground the literary source text, but this presents its own dangers, often centring on fidelity, valuing the reproduction of an 'authentic' text, and leading to 'binary' style criticism which aims to depict mechanically the 'translation' of various aspects of the narrative. This dilemma proves to be one of the stumbling blocks of this thesis. Working across disciplines and departments can work to enrich a study, but divergences in critical concerns and approaches inevitably crop up.

Much of the difficulty might be said to arise from the origins of film and television studies and the subsequent divide between the studies of literature and film. The study of film began as an option within English Literature departments, before establishing its own separate discipline, removed from conventions of literary criticism such as the centrality of the author. The new discipline might be said to be resentful – or forgetful – of its past. Colin MacCabe points to this divide, in 'Realism and the Cinema', as one which is relatively absent in film and literary production, and is most perpetuated in academic fields.<sup>137</sup> With two seemingly disparate fields, involving uniquely different approaches to their respective cultural texts, it is interesting to note the recent development in comparative studies. For example, at the University of Iowa, the first university in the United States to establish the study of film, the department, once under the umbrella of 'Communication Studies', has now joined 'Literary Studies', restructured as 'Comparative Literature'. This new institutional trend may signal a fresh understanding between the two disciplines, perhaps hoping to match the fluidity with which writers, artists, and directors themselves move across generic boundaries.

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<sup>136</sup> McFarlane, 'It Wasn't Like That In the Book', p. 163.

<sup>137</sup> Colin MacCabe, 'Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses', *Theoretical Essays: Film, Linguistics, Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 33-57.

Alan Warner has explained the symbiotic relationship between film and novel: 'People have been sounding the death of the book for too long, when cinema became huge in the 1950s people predicted the end of the novel but movies actually lead to more novel reading.'<sup>138</sup> Those who read the book will see the film and those who see the film may be encouraged to read the book. The marketing ideal would be if the filmgoer were to leave the multiplex in the shopping mall and immediately proceed to buy the soundtrack and/or book. Bookselling and the marketing of film have developed complex strategies, often involving tie-ins. Because of the projected increase in sales after the release of a film, a publisher may be willing to invest in the film's production in exchange for the exclusive use of tie-ins such as a special issuing of the novel with a still from the film to coincide with its cinematic release.<sup>139</sup> One example of such canny marketing strategies (or product placement) is the subliminal advertising of *Captain Correlli's Mandolin* (presumably signalling its imminent adaptation) in the production company Working Title's feature *Notting Hill* (Roger Michell, 1999) when the film's heroine, played by Julia Roberts, enters a bookshop and enquires about a copy of the book.

Although adaptation theory often claims to counter issues of fidelity, analysis of particular adaptations always returns to the eternal question.<sup>140</sup> George Bluestone, the earliest influential critic to compose a book-length study on the subject, continually comes back to the issue. According to Brian McFarlane, sixty years after the publication of Bluestone's study, little has changed: 'Bluestone wrote of the overt compatibility but secret hostility between novel and film; in the intervening decades nothing has happened radically to

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<sup>138</sup> Strachan, 'Existential Ecstasy', n.pag.

<sup>139</sup> For example, in a letter from Bernard MacLaverty's agents, Anthony Sheil Associates, to Penguin, negotiating payment, it is suggested that they also put up money for the film. Penguin also released a paperback simultaneously with the film release. From BFI: David Puttnam Archive.

<sup>140</sup> Robert Stam has discussed the issue at some length in his essay, 'Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation', in James Naremore's *Film Adaptation* (London: Athlone, 2000), pp. 54-76. Rather than issues of fidelity, Stam urges a focus on intertextual relations.

challenge this perception.<sup>141</sup> Cinema has suffered at the hands of what McFarlane refers to as a 'Leavisite evaluative judgement, a high culture/popular culture hierarchy, in which film inevitably comes below/behind the literary text'.<sup>142</sup> Indeed, Leavis' hostility to the cinema has permeated several facets of criticism. Nevertheless, although the intervening decades between the publication of Bluestone's pioneering work and the present offered little intervention, it did witness the growth of additional hostilities, namely that of film towards literature. It was following Bluestone's book, most notably in the 1970s, that film studies took off, often in the opposite direction of literature departments. This may account for the reality that McFarlane notes, for those in film studies to be as ignorant about literature as those in literature are about film.<sup>143</sup>

McFarlane's own intervention involves several case studies through which he asserts his primary goal – to distinguish between what is easily transferred from page to screen, and what is impossible to adapt. While most of the book's efforts are spent on picking apart individual plots, the overall contribution of the book to a general theory of adaptation is limited.<sup>144</sup> This is the dilemma of adaptation studies. The need for an integrated approach is clear in theory, but difficult to execute in practice.

McFarlane, like many of his contemporaries, calls for the study of intertextual relations in adaptation, or what Robert Giddings refers to as the 'pleasure of intertextuality'.<sup>145</sup> Like Rabelais' explosion of endless quotations and parodies, the text is seen as a site in which the dialogic relationship between film and literature is played out, a relationship Keith

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<sup>141</sup> McFarlane, 'It Wasn't Like That In the Book', p. 164.

<sup>142</sup> McFarlane, 'It Wasn't Like That In the Book', p. 164.

<sup>143</sup> McFarlane, 'It Wasn't Like That In the Book', p. 164.

<sup>144</sup> Brian McFarlane, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

<sup>145</sup> Robert Giddings and Erica Sheen (eds.), *The Classic Novel: from Page to Screen* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).



Cohen in the late 1970s coined as the 'dynamics of exchange'.<sup>146</sup> From the very inception of film, in addition to its reliance on literary texts to feed its hunger for raw material, it has been difficult to deny its influence upon writers. Modernist writers such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf professed a strong interest in cinema. Conversely, Alfred Hitchcock and Sergei Eisenstein are representative of directors who have drawn inspiration from modernist writers. In this thesis, several contemporary writers - Irvine Welsh, Roddy Doyle, Patrick McCabe, and William McIlvanney - claim their primary influences from film.

These relations inevitably call notions of authorship into question. Each adaptation represented in this thesis is of course different, through process and outcome. One aspect of this thesis will be to gauge the locations and levels of authorial control. Many authors adapt from their own work, but ultimately allow the director to make a final interpretation from script to screen. In other cases, the director may write the screenplay as well. But film is a medium involving several artists, not to mention production companies, funding bodies, etc., which also enforce their own degrees and variations of authorial control. In film, the many different levels of interlocution come into play. Screenwriter, director, and cast, all play determinate roles in the communication of the 'original' narrative, a moment which also relies on the screening and distribution of the film, and therefore involves yet more outside influences. Although it might be said that literature does not require the interlocutor as film does – that with a novel, communication is directed between the writer and the reader - publishing houses, agents, and editors have also been known to have a heavy hand in the form and content of the finished text. Still, the realities testify that the increased funding requirements of cinema often involve an equivalent increase in intervention from outside sources. Roddy Doyle for instance, has remarked on the relative degree of encouragement towards representing the local in his published fiction in

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<sup>146</sup> Keith Cohen, *Film to Fiction: The Dynamics of Exchange* (New Haven: Yale University Press,

comparison to his adapted films. He explained that although he had never been given any indication that he 'should make a local reference generic', when considering the distribution of *The Snapper*, Miramax urged the filmmakers to replace the word 'gobshite' in the film text with the word 'asshole' for its American release.<sup>147</sup> If author equals authority, writers such as Doyle or Welsh have exercised very little 'authorial control' in their work, preferring to allow the characters to speak with the least intervention.<sup>148</sup> By contrast, it is often the marketing requirements of production and distribution companies that serve as a sort of obtrusive narrator controlling and negotiating the expression of the characters. This is a theme that will be explored in detail throughout the thesis.

### **Method**

Robert Crawford's charting of a 'devolving' literature moves towards cultural studies, but also encourages further links to be made with other disciplines. While this thesis aims to forge such links, it requires a balancing act between Scottish and Irish cultural criticism and between Irish and Scottish literary and film criticism, as well as various adaptation theories. Other studies such as Lance Pettitt's *Screening Ireland*, successfully strike this balance between text and context.<sup>149</sup> On the other hand, the necessity to adequately tend to these issues ultimately requires that an in-depth consideration of the multiple functions of adaptation is relegated to a secondary status. Other 'cultural' approaches likewise forego their position as a study exclusively concerned with adaptation. Instead, it is hoped that the comparative nature of the study will produce interesting links which reveal new insights to

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1979).

<sup>147</sup> 'New Irish Cinema –Day of Debate', *Irish Film Board*, Irish Film Centre, April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2003.

<sup>148</sup> Glenda Norquay and Gerry Smyth discuss the technique to 'dispense with what Joyce called "perverted" commas, those scriptive markers of different voice-zones by means of which the textual world is orchestrated in line with established discourses of power.' In their, 'Waking Up in a Different Place: Contemporary Irish and Scottish Fiction', Glenda Norquay and Gerry Smyth (eds.), *Across the Margins: Cultural Identity and Change in the Atlantic Archipelago* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 154-170: 161.

<sup>149</sup> Lance Pettitt, *Screening Ireland: Film and Television Representation* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. xiv.

each particular area and lay the groundwork for future analysis. Although the thesis does not employ a wholly comparative approach which would avoid separating the discussions of authors, it is hoped that the chapter and section divisions do not detract from the comparative aims of the thesis.

What follows is divided into two sections. The first will focus on adaptations of Irish literature to film. This section will include chapters on Bernard MacLaverty's *Lamb* and *Cal*, Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*, Roddy Doyle's *The Barrytown Trilogy*, and Christy Brown's *My Left Foot*. The second section, focusing on adaptations of Scottish fiction, will include chapters on Christopher Rush's *A Twelvemonth and a Day*, William McIlvanney's *The Big Man* and 'Dreaming', Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*, and Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar*.

In many ways it might seem regressive to approach the films in terms of their 'National' representation. Resistance to such studies is clear at a time when national boundaries are seen to be blurring. Edward Said articulated his wish for such a dissolution at the close of *Culture and Imperialism*: 'No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was all about.'<sup>150</sup> This thesis will make connections between films and cultures, but Said might question the point of such an exercise. However, my intention is not to fashion a clear understanding of 'Celtic' representation. Rather, my aim is to question what is already understood and to build from the progressive acceptance and encouragement of divergent representations.

Richard Kearney, confronting the problems of nationalism, identifies 'post-nationalism' as a state in which we can forego the problems of nation-state nationalism, emphasizing the

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<sup>150</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 408.

importance of multiple identities and 'regionalism'.<sup>151</sup> Douglas Gifford also praises a new 'willingness to allow a multi-faceted Scotland, no longer demanding allegiance to a single MacDiarmid agenda, but recognizing other people's right to perceive Scotland differently, and to imagine it differently also'.<sup>152</sup> Sabina Sharkey has attributed these more fluid interpretations of nationalism to a multi-disciplinary approach. She explains:

More recently however, and particularly from the 1980s onwards, a more multi-disciplinary approach has developed [...] Influenced by contemporary developments in critical and cultural studies, this newer focus has benefited both nationally and internationally from a degree of border traffic between disciplines and from acknowledging a plurality of Irelands.<sup>153</sup>

Rather than interpret the comparative study of Scotland and Ireland as another way of homogenizing cultural representation and criticism, the interdisciplinary approach should be accepted as encouraging multiple readings and interpretations.

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<sup>151</sup> Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 17.

<sup>152</sup> Douglas Gifford, 'Imagining Scotlands: The Return to Mythology in Modern Scottish Fiction', in Susanne Hagemann (ed.), *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), pp. 17-49: 37.

<sup>153</sup> Sabina Sharkey, 'A View of the Present State of Irish Studies', in Susan Bassnett (ed.), *Studying British Cultures: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 113-114: 114.

## **SECTION ONE: Irish literature to film**

## 1. Bernard MacLaverty: *Cal* and *Lamb*

Bernard MacLaverty, a successful writer of novels, short stories, and children's books, as well as scripts for television, radio and theatre, has had two of his novels adapted to film, *Cal* (Pat O'Connor, 1984) and *Lamb* (Colin Gregg, 1985).<sup>1</sup> Although *Lamb* was the first fiction to film project, well before the novel was published, MacLaverty was in the habit of translating his stories into other media. Initially, at the time of *Lamb*'s publication, BBC Radio expressed interest in broadcasting it as a 'Book at Bedtime'.<sup>2</sup> MacLaverty was then working on adapting his short story, 'Secrets', as a radio play for the BBC's 'Thirty Minute Theatre' series.<sup>3</sup> MacLaverty continued to adapt several other short stories for the radio including 'My Dear Palestrina' (1980), 'No Joke' (1983), 'Some Surrender' (1988), and 'The Break' (1992).<sup>4</sup> It wasn't until 1992, several years after the film's release, that *Lamb* was finally adapted for BBC radio. By this time, MacLaverty, in addition to adapting for the big screen, had also devised several dramatic scripts for BBC television including *My Dear Palestrina* (1980), *Phonefun Limited* (1982), *The Daily Woman* (1986), and *Some Time in*

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard MacLaverty, *Lamb* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1980) and *Cal* (London: Penguin, 1984). Further references will be by page number in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard MacLaverty to Marilyn Ireland, 21 May 1980, in 'Secrets' portfolio, Special Collections, University of Glasgow.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Cooper, Head of BBC Drama in Northern Ireland, has remarked that although it is becoming harder to break into the industry, he feels 'the biggest opportunity is certainly in terms of continuing series but another opportunity, strange as it may seem, is radio'. Although MacLaverty's work was with BBC Scotland, Cooper notes that in Northern Ireland, 'two very significant writers started writing for radio two or three years ago, Pearse Elliott and Gary Mitchell'.<sup>3</sup> BBC, et al. 'BBC Television Producer Briefing Day: Drama Session', [www.bbc.co.uk/commissioning/strategy/swbd\\_drama](http://www.bbc.co.uk/commissioning/strategy/swbd_drama), 2002, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> 'Secrets' appears in MacLaverty's short story collection *Secrets & Other Stories* (London: Vintage, 1977). 'My Dear Palestrina' and 'No Joke' are from *A Time to Dance & Other Stories* (London: Vintage, 1982). 'The Break' and 'Some Surrender' are from *The Great Profundo & Other Stories* (London: Vintage, 1987).

*August* (1989).<sup>5</sup> MacLavery also adapted Somerville and Ross's *The Real Charlotte* (1989) for Granada as a four-part television drama. Most recently, he has received a 'Creative Scotland' award to write and direct a short film based on a poem by Seamus Heaney.<sup>6</sup>

### *MacLavery and Irishness*

Perhaps because MacLavery is now living and writing in Scotland, Ian Spring, in his essay on Scottish film and fiction, lists *Cal* under the category of 'films made from books that *should* be Scottish'.<sup>7</sup> It is not surprising that *Cal* would invoke the desire to adopt MacLavery as Scotland's own, but the dramatic attention, as with most of MacLavery's fiction, is unmistakably fixed on Ireland. The film's national allegiances are even further problematised when its production as part of the 'First Love Series' for Channel 4 is taken into consideration. It is in this regard that the producer of the narrative might aim to establish the film specifically within 'British' Television. John Caughie has remarked on the 'First Love Series' and its particular representation of Britishness, describing the films as 'distinctly, if somewhat sentimentally, British, with something of the style of a single play on television but with an added visual sophistication derived from film production values'.<sup>8</sup> *Cal*, directed by Pat O'Connor,<sup>9</sup> who established his career as a BBC television director, might in some ways be regarded as a 'British' representation of Ireland, in the same way the film version of *The Commitments* (Alan Parker, 1991) is considered to be reframed within the context of British representation by its direction under yet another

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<sup>5</sup> 'Phonefun Limited' originated as a short story in *A Time to Dance*.

<sup>6</sup> Mike Wade, 'Debate Rages as Creative Scotland Names Winners of £300,000 Fund', *Scotsman*, 6 March 2003, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Spring, 'Image and Text: Fiction on Film', pp. 206-216.

<sup>8</sup> John Caughie, 'Broadcasting and Cinema 1: Converging Histories', in Charles Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: BFI, 1986), pp. 189-205.

<sup>9</sup> Neil Jordan was also approached by producer David Puttnam. Jordan, unhappy with the overwhelming feeling of guilt in the narrative, proposed altering the story to reveal the murder of Marcella's husband to have released her from an oppressive marriage. However, nothing ever came

BBC figure, Alan Parker. Timothy D. Taylor wrote of *The Commitments*: 'what audiences are left with is a film by an English director about some semi-exotic musicians who are English—sort of'.<sup>10</sup>

However the influence of Channel 4 is interpreted, *Cal*'s basis in MacLaverty's narrative suggests, at the very least, a degree of reflection on the notion of Northern Ireland and a consideration of its vexed and problematic relation to Britishness. Many of MacLaverty's short stories are set specifically in Ireland (North and South), and those which are not usually detail the experiences of characters from Ireland on holiday, grappling with issues of their identity outside their usual contexts. This is also a familiar scenario in two of MacLaverty's novels, *Grace Notes* and *Lamb*, and is quite literally represented in 'Between Two Shores', a short story narrated from a ferry between England and Belfast, depicting the internal negotiations of the main character's feelings for his family and life in Northern Ireland, and new relations and transitory home in London.<sup>11</sup> MacLaverty himself points out that it is a common trait amongst Irish writers to have gone away at some point from Ireland in order to look back from a different perspective.<sup>12</sup>

In an introduction to MacLaverty's short stories, Arnold Saxton argues that even when the locations are ambiguous, the stories remain bound up with Irishness 'in their pervading atmosphere'.<sup>13</sup> Certainly with some of his short stories this is the case, but with the adapted novels - *Cal* and *Lamb* – the locations, hardly ambiguous, prove highly significant in their negotiations with 'Irishness'. In *Lamb*, the character's experiences outside of Ireland - in

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of it. Neil Jordan, *Michael Collins: Screenplay and Film Diary* (New York: Plume, an imprint of Dutton Signet, a division of Penguin, 1996), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Timothy D. Taylor, 'Living in a Postcolonial World: Class and Soul in *The Commitments*', *Irish Studies Review*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1998, pp. 291-302: 298.

<sup>11</sup> Bernard MacLaverty, *Grace Notes* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997). 'Between Two Shores' is from *Secrets & Other Stories*, pp. 46-58.

<sup>12</sup> Christian Ganter, 'Bernard MacLaverty, Glasgow, in Interview with Christian Ganter, Würzburg', *Anglistik: Mitteilungen Berbandes Deutsch Er Anglisten*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1996, pp. 5-22.

<sup>13</sup> Arnold Saxton, 'An Introduction to the Stories of Bernard MacLaverty', *Journal of the Short Story in English*, no. 8, 1987, pp. 113-122.



England – prove crucial to the narrative's development or understanding of the character. In an attempt to compensate for years of neglect, Michael offers as many enjoyable experiences as he can to the dispossessed young boy, Owen. However, for both of them the experiences are new. In an ironic twist, perhaps critiquing concepts of Britishness, upon arrival Michael asks Owen on the train how he likes England, and the boy replies 'O.K. Anyway it's Scotland' (p. 37). For both, the journey involves discovering new places, but also affords the opportunity to re-examine their home from a fresh perspective. But their accent ensures that they are never entirely detached from Ireland, and makes certain that they are continually identified with their homeland. Accent exposes their identity in the hotel they are staying at, forcing them to discuss 'home' with an Irishwoman working there, and introduces Michael to Haddock, a man with whom they will eventually share a derelict house. Haddock, overhearing Michael's accent in a pub, asks him what part of Ireland he is from. Michael's response, 'Dublin', causes Haddock to react caustically, replying 'Christ, they're in some mess over there' (p. 118) and swiftly moves the focus of discussion to Northern Ireland. Haddock reveals that he had been in the Army, and confesses to Michael: 'No disrespect, mate, but I hate your fucking country. I hate the British Army an' all' (p. 120). Again, in the film, when Michael takes work at a construction site, the first questions asked are: Are you from the North? Are you one of us? Michael refuses to answer directly, but replies that he is 'not one of *them*'. Even when the two are in hiding, they are forced to identify with home. When Michael is swindled by a card-sharp in London, he reacts angrily and shouts at Owen that he 'hate(s) being taken [for a] stupid bloody Irishman'.

*Lamb*, like many of MacLaverty's writings set away from 'home', does not avoid reflecting on the characters' relationship to Ireland and their sense of their own Irishness. Even with his subsequent novel, *Grace Notes*, it is the emotional significance of Catherine returning to Ireland for her father's funeral that initiates the narrative. The various novels and short stories exploring notions of exile, looking back to Ireland from outside, and often further

distanced by the passing of time, denotes MacLaverty's commitment to illustrating diverse perspectives on 'Irishness' throughout his fictional works. But what MacLaverty ironically terms the process of 'looking back' connotes a vision, or a way of seeing, and in fact MacLaverty's own stories, even through their subjective narrative telling, involve a wealth of visual detail. This process of developing a picture of MacLaverty's native land, through the rich imagery upon which the emotions of the characters are mapped, lends itself well to a visual medium.

### *MacLaverty's cinematic style*

MacLaverty's writing often centres on characters isolated either emotionally or physically, expressed through particular internal and subjective narration. As with all fiction, this poses certain difficulties when adapting to the outwardly objective medium of film.

Although it may be argued that the cinematic equivalent of the novel's narrator is the camera, or more generally speaking, the framing device through which the spectator is situated and initiated into the fictional world of the film, specific instances of narrational devices are typically brief, and are rarely sustained throughout an entire film. In order for the spectator to identify with a character in a subjective way, we must lose sight of her/him from the frame. And very likely, if a character remains a dominant narrator throughout the duration of the film, he/she will be seen outside the centre of the action or story.

Ultimately, as Joy Boyum has noted,

subjective viewpoints seem much less a matter of course, and first-person perspectives especially tend to confront the medium with considerable difficulty. To present any action strictly and rigorously from the eyes of a first-person observer means excluding that observer from the scene - an effect which, if not totally unmanageable, can still seem very clumsy on screen.<sup>14</sup>

Even attempts to identify the main character with the camera in order to approximate a subjective narration could be said to have failed. Films such as Robert Montgomery's *The Lady in the Lake* (1947) have used the camera as a mimetic device, representing the field

of vision of the main protagonist. Instead of convincing the spectator of its subjective narration, the device becomes a distraction and source of confusion. The camera fails to accurately mimic the spatial relations of the human body. For instance, a depiction of the main protagonist smoking involves a cigarette flashing in and out of the frame, but never at a believable distance. Characters addressing the protagonist speak directly to the camera, and thus straight to the audience, taking an edge off any voyeuristic pleasure the spectator may have experienced, leaving an unsettling feeling in its place.<sup>15</sup> In one remarkable example, the technique renders a potentially dramatic moment into a laughable scenario when the main character's love interest moves into extreme close-up for a kiss, and must awkwardly manoeuvre around the camera lens. As Montgomery's film demonstrates, representing complete subjectivity is not always desirable and it is accepted that some narrational devices must be exchanged for others available to the adaptive medium.

In many respects, MacLaverty's writing, although highly subjective, arguably lends itself readily to the medium of film. In their close analysis of the adaptation of *Cal*, Paul Simpson and Martin Montgomery argue that Cal's voyeuristic viewpoint, privileged in the novel, is easily adapted by the 'cinematic gaze' of the camera.<sup>16</sup> In other words, even though the narration may prove subjective, much of the psychological development of Cal's character within the novel is created through his relation to objects around him. Cal's emotional state is mapped onto his immediate environment through his gaze upon the physical world. Even in his imagination, his physical surroundings are ripe terrain. For instance, waiting on a street corner, Cal visualises, in his mind's eye, an imagined shooting.

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<sup>14</sup> Joy Gould Boyum, *Double Exposure: Fiction into Film* (New York: Universe Books, 1985), p. 87.

<sup>15</sup> Conventional criticism has warned against the use of direct address for transgressing the transparency of narration, calling attention to the constructed nature of the film, and generally going against the conventions of classical realist cinema. However, recent practices are more accepting of the technique. For instance Kieron Walsh's *Watermelon* innovatively employs the device.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Simpson and Martin Montgomery, 'Language, Literature and Film: The Stylistics of Bernard MacLaverty's *Cal*', in Verdonk and Weber (eds.), *Twentieth Century Fiction: From Text to Context* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 138-164.

Conversely, depending on how the narrative is read, one could say his environment is mapped onto him.

MacLavery has had the salutary experience of adapting his own work. Some would argue that it is best to leave the painstaking alterations necessary for a successful transition from one medium to the next to someone else, given that the task undoubtedly requires a distanced perspective and solemn respect for the abilities and constraints of each medium. Although MacLavery was involved in the adaptation of two of his own novels by acting as the screenwriter for both, it is not possible to discuss the film as having a similar ownership to that of the novel. Even if MacLavery has been praised for the novel's subtle representation of conflict in Northern Ireland it is not certain that an adaptation of the narrative will employ the same degree of subtlety. Both versions might achieve a similar effect, but the film's portrayal of MacLavery's narrative is ultimately the result of a collaboration of artists.

In effect, writers offer their own individual story to be analysed and interpreted in a collaborative effort in which the one story is subjected to the interpretation of an entire group of artists and technicians. Generally speaking, it takes the finished product of a reader's experience with the story and attempts a sort of autopsy of similarities and differences until the story is reassembled into a 'final' vision. With multiple possible interpretations at play in addition to the involvement or the presence of the writer during the process of adaptation, the project's structure insists that many others influence this final vision. Although MacLavery may have his foot in the door of the control room through his role as screenwriter, his voice will become incorporated into many others. It is difficult to attribute control over the final form and content of the film, but it is safe to say it ceases to represent solely MacLavery's creative vision.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the film is no longer clearly

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<sup>17</sup> Although there is hardly ever a 'singular artistic vision'. Novelists also experience difficulties with creative freedom when publishing their work. Still, writing remains in principle, at least at the moment of composition, a process that involves a considerable degree of control on the part of the author.

defined by a notion of individual authorship. In significant ways the fact that the film versions of *Cal* or *Lamb* met occasional criticism for their deviation from the original source is a result of this.

In an effort to avoid the futile discussions often characterising the study of adaptation, in which the film is discussed evaluatively in relation to the book, particularly in terms of MacLaverty's depiction of 'The Troubles', it is necessary for the film to be looked at in terms of a collaborative enterprise. More importantly, the adaptations must be compared to similar film and literary projects and evaluated in terms of their cultural representations, but also the implications for the literary and film tradition in Ireland.

The narrative transformation occurring through the shift from one medium to the next also generates additional complexities in relation to the cultural context in which the narrative is placed. Even if it is tricky placing MacLaverty within a specific literary tradition, or carving out for him a niche within an Irish nationalist discourse, as the author of a fiction, he is singular. The content of the fictions may complicate such clear, nationalist divisions, but the complexities of locating a particular fiction within a nationalist discourse becomes muddled when introduced to the medium of film. As a film, the fictions are no longer the product of an individual, but the efforts of various influences.

### ***Representing 'The Troubles'***

The production of *Cal* in particular marks an interesting contrast in the novel's representation with that of the film. The novel, like many of MacLaverty's fictions, focuses on the experience of one character. Cast in an Oedipal web, the story details the experience of Cal as he struggles to come to terms with the effects of his own ambivalent involvement with the IRA. Unable to secure employment, Cal, much to his father's dismay, turns down a job at the local abattoir where his father works because he is unable to stomach the brutality. Complying with friends who are involved in the IRA, he agrees to act as a driver. After one of the runs results in the murder of a policeman, Cal recalls the

sequence of events throughout the novel, which show him to be an accessory to the murder. Cal meets and then continues to obsess over Marcella, the widow left behind, and ironically finds work on the farm where she lives with her daughter, mother, and father-in-law. As a relationship develops between Cal and Marcella, his struggle to repress his past actions begins to fail as the romance narrative is continually interrupted by the violent past. In the film, the images resurfacing through a series of flashbacks and musical motifs refuse to let him forget, and remind him of the consequences. Interestingly, the spectator is not privileged with all of the details of Cal's guilt, and the crime is revealed through the piecing together of puzzle-like flashbacks, with brief shots of the murder alternating with more benign shots of the landscape or episodes involving the love affair with Marcella. This technique offers its most intense representation of the murder in the sequence depicting Marcella and Cal's lovemaking.

In a similar fashion, *Lamb* calls on temporally discordant images in order to suggest the presence of a fatalistic power. Director Colin Gregg was already familiar with the process of adaptation, taking on a story by D.H. Lawrence with his television film *The Trespasser* (1981).<sup>18</sup> *Lamb* follows the experiences of Brother Michael Lamb, a teacher at a remand home in Ireland, as he forms a bond with wronged, epileptic ten-year old, Owen, cast off by his family before being abused by another priest in the school. Brother Michael eventually saves Owen from the coldness of the institution, and runs away with him to London where he endeavours to offer him a wealth of experience hitherto denied him. The two are forced to conceal their identity and adopt a false one as father and son in order to hide from the authorities. But as the net is tightening, it becomes clear that Michael's ability to positively affect Owen's life is only temporary, and that previous grievances will quickly be reinstated. This realisation drives Michael to his actions in the tragic ending, when he drowns the boy and attempts to do the same to himself.

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<sup>18</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *The Trespasser* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960).

In *Cal* and *Lamb*, as Gary Brienzo and others have noted, it is the emotional and social isolation frequently characterising MacLaverty's fiction which ultimately drives the characters towards an unstoppable fate.<sup>19</sup> While Michael in *Lamb* decides his own fate, there is still a feeling of inescapability. Even their names suggest their connections to be predestined. Towards the end of the novel Michael Lamb repeats Owen's name to himself, remembering 'In Gaelic Owen meant lamb. Benedict had told him when he said that their stars were crossed' (p. 143). Even when he is in the midst of drowning Owen in his epileptic state, Michael continually calls out to Jesus, asking for help. He is compelled to continue and rationalises it as the only choice he finds acceptable.

Both films draw on this sense of fate by building on the central image from which the narrative unfolds. The film version of *Lamb* begins with a freeze frame of Michael emerging from the waves, and in fact begins where it will eventually end (unable to drown himself, Michael sits in contemplative limbo on the beach, until the sun finally sets - closing the narrative in a rather ambivalent fashion). Similarly, *Cal* opens with a key moment, before exploring the surrounding events leading up to it. Throughout, violent images of the murder are intercut and coupled with musical motifs, delivering the narrative as a haunting of Cal's repressed memory. The narrative structure, organised so that throughout the film we are offered glimpses of the events that took place on the night of the murder, becomes most prominent in the lovemaking scene, when images of Marcella and Cal are interspersed with the violent images which flashback to the fateful night.

MacLaverty has described this style of narrative structure as being similar to assessing the life of a tree through its rings. The key moment of epiphany he compares to something he had read by a doctor in *The Observer* about the production of adrenaline in those who are under stress and the resulting clarity of perception and memory. As evidenced in his novels, which hinge around such focal points, MacLaverty likens the moment to someone

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<sup>19</sup> Gary Brienzo, 'The Voice of Despair in Ireland's Bernard MacLaverty', *North Dakota Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 1, 1989, pp. 67-77.

who is in a crash: '...you see the whole thing vividly for the rest of your life, in moments of high anxiety and high stress your body suddenly pumps up adrenaline and freezes all these memories'.<sup>20</sup> The structure of the novel is, for the most part, mirrored by the film. However, the flashbacks occur less frequently in the written form and do not play as strong a thematic role. In the novel, they are a dramatic method of unravelling the narrative in a way that mimics Cal's own subconscious guilt in his relations with Marcella. In the film, particularly in the scene previously discussed, the flashbacks act in a similar fashion as concise moments of trauma around which the narrative revolves, but because of film's ability to cut through space and time with such rapidity, the flashbacks segment the lovemaking scene to great dramatic effect.

Unlike *Cal*, structuring the narrative as a flashback, working through images presented earlier in the narrative, *Lamb* did not exist in this form as a novel, but was altered for the film version. In an interview, MacLaverty has described the necessity to abandon certain images of the novel for new ones better suited to the medium of film. More specifically, he refers to the opening sequence of the novel, which involves the contrasting imagery of the sea and crows that are likened to the brothers of the remand home. Even though he acknowledges the capacity of film to capture the metaphor through a montage of contrasting shots between the brothers and crows, he seems to find the convention less subtle on screen than on the page, dismissing the possibility of such a technique as 'stupid'. When moving into a medium such as film, which, like the novel, has developed through a combination of adherence to and deviance from various narrative conventions, some images may seem inventive on the page, but when transferred to the screen may indirectly refer to the overused techniques of the medium. Interviewed in *Cencrastus*, MacLaverty has described the differences in writing for radio, television and film:

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<sup>20</sup> Rosa González, 'Bernard MacLaverty: Interviewed By Rosa González', in Esther Aliag, Rosa González, Jacqueline Hurtle and Inés Praga (eds.), *Ireland in Writing: Interviews with Writers and Academics* (Rodopi: Amsterdam-Atlanta, GA, 1998), pp. 21-38: 26.



I've found that the most words used are on the page in the book, then you write a radio play and there's just enough to fill the silence, then there's the TV and you need less again, and then for the big screen you just need grunts... It's a different kind of imagination, a different way of telling a story, but it's still narrative.<sup>21</sup>

But it is not a case of creating images out of nothing. Instead, even though MacLaverty found it was necessary 'to abandon the image' he explained how undoubtedly 'new ones come up'. Not surprisingly, considering the cultural context of both adaptations, religious imagery forms a prominent and poignant central focus.

The filmmakers of *Cal* also attached importance to the ability of the spectator to recognize the conflict in visually graphic forms and saw the necessity for the distinction between Protestant and Catholic to remain 'clear and identifiable'.<sup>22</sup> When deciding on the opening of *Lamb*, MacLaverty resolved that he

wanted an image to start the film, one which would show something of institutionalised religion and the way people respond to religion. So the film starts in a class, and the whole class are making crucifixes and then you just see one boy lifting one of twenty of Christ's figures of plastic, a version of the resurrection which is echoed at the end of the film with the death of the boy.<sup>23</sup>

However, although the film does begin the narrative with the imagery of this scene, the spectator's first exposure to the narrative is the freeze frame of Michael on the beach, at the end of the story.

Because both of the adaptations involve stories which address (however inadvertently)<sup>24</sup> Northern Ireland, it becomes culturally significant who is being represented and how. Brian McIlroy's book on the filmic representation of Northern Ireland expresses dismay at the lack of Protestant representation in films, and more frequently the tendency to not

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Moore, 'Grace Quotes: Bernard MacLaverty', *Cencrastus*, no. 59, 1998, pp. 17-20.

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Alison Odell (Puttnam's assistant) to David Puttnam, July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1983, BFI: David Puttnam archive.

<sup>23</sup> González, 'Bernard MacLaverty: Interviewed by Rosa González', p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> Although both the novel and film *Lamb* are set in Southern Ireland, the central character, Michael, is from Northern Ireland – a fact that occasionally enables a general reflection on Northern Ireland.

represent Protestants as civilians.<sup>25</sup> A film such as *Cal* and *Lamb* does not seem to fall neatly into this category, perhaps precisely because it is an adaptation. Certainly not all films with Northern Ireland as their subject matter are guilty of caricaturing Protestants, but perhaps because films are set in Northern Ireland in order to suit a specific genre (i.e. crime, gangster, political drama) they necessarily adhere to the conventions of the genre that require specific features, namely character and plot tropes.

For Margaret Scanlan, '*Cal* depicts goodwill and hatred alike as evenly distributed between religious factions...', and the resulting fiction gives 'Northern Ireland the human face'<sup>26</sup> that is often foregone for dramatic caricatures. Joe Cleary, in his essay on narrative representations of Northern Ireland, not only argues that state borders have been strangely left out of narratives of film and literature, but that the border consistently seems to arise in some form of haunting. He goes on to list the *Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, 1992) and *Cal* as examples which typify narratives that magnify the sectarian divide, always relegating part of the representation to the margins of the narrative. Styling *Cal* a 'romance-across-the-divide' narrative, Cleary ultimately sees the union between Cal and Marcella as 'a veiled allegory or furtive fantasy of a "nationalising embrace" for which the state equivalent could only be a united Ireland' or a resolution of conflict in the North.<sup>27</sup> Fidelma Farley has remarked upon these impossible romance narratives in films focusing on Northern Ireland as calling upon 'the viewer's hostility against (usually) the IRA for preventing romantic resolution and thus the formation of the family, which represents the possibility of a stable society/nation'.<sup>28</sup> MacLaverty himself feels if he were to write it again, he would not have

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<sup>25</sup> McIlroy, *Shooting to Kill*.

<sup>26</sup> Margaret Scanlan, 'The Unbearable Present: Northern Ireland in Four Contemporary Novels', *Études Irlandaises*, no. 10, December 1985, pp. 145-161.

<sup>27</sup> Joe Cleary, "'Fork Tongued on the Border Bit': Partition and the Politics of Form in Contemporary Narratives of the Northern Irish Conflict", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 95, no. 1, 1996, pp. 227-276: 251.

<sup>28</sup> Fidelma Farley, 'Ireland, the Past and British Cinema: *Ryan's Daughter* (1970)', Claire Monk and Amy Sargeant (eds.), *British Historical Cinema: The History, Heritage, and Costume Film* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 129-143: 140.

caricatured the IRA to the extent that he did. Still, he does agree that many people have read the film in different ways, and in the end it is not easy to identify its affiliations.

Although an emphasis on the oral culture of Ireland/Northern Ireland has often been pointed to as a reason for the absence of a wealth of indigenous visual or filmic representations, it is difficult to overlook the iconic representations in the films that do exist. For instance, in *Cal* images of the sectarian divide infiltrate the entire length of the film. Photographs and images of the Queen Mother and Prince Charles and Princess Diana, the spectacle of an Orange March and 'God Save the Queen' broadcast on the television, are all interchanged with signs detailing the gravity of sins (i.e. paintings of the crucifixion, and the rituals of mass). In one particular scene, Cal is beaten up by a group of young men, and although it is dark and the figures indecipherable, a union jack shirt worn by one of the men stands out brightly in contrast. Almost disembodied, it is the only thing plainly visible. In other words, at times the space of the film is organised around these iconic images themselves, which gather great prominence on screen, suffocating the rest, and sometimes leaving little room for the characters. Similarly, a photograph of Marcella's murdered husband, Robert, sits in a prominent position in the living room supposedly due to the wishes of Marcella's mother-in-law. It is this visual prominence - the importance and significance of images that dominate the narrative - that becomes so poignant in the filmic translation.

*Lamb* functions in a similar fashion. The uncanny power of the photograph is explored through the T-shirts Owen and Michael exchange, each bearing a photograph of the other. In the novel, Michael experiences a recurring desire to create some sort of mental 'snapshot' encapsulating the boy entirely. Michael feared what Owen's life would be like if they went back: 'Brother Benedict's triumph, his punishments and victimisation; the boy's mother weeping and drinking and hating...A life of misery, of frustration that led to inevitable crime and lovelessness' (p. 147). This drives him to decide Owen's death is the best option and 'was for love; what he planned was a photograph, a capturing of the

stillness of the moment of the boy's happiness. Irreversible and therefore eternal -- if eternity existed' (p. 147). Owen's descriptions of the ecstasy - or the aura - before his seizures is what Michael would like to preserve in a way he likens to a photograph.

Interestingly, in the film, it is the sight of his own photographed face on the T-shirt of the drowning boy that disturbs him, forcing him to cover the image with his hand. It seems to serve as a reminder that certain images may not be the ones we desire, but are just as powerful and real, and are not in our power to control when and where they surface.

The powerful visual iconography in many places overwhelms the narrative and at times risks alienating audiences from its characters, and perhaps explains MacLaverty's feelings that the image is somehow less subtle, and more brash, than its descriptive representation on page. This 'belligerence' of the image coupled with the genres the narratives are applied to, as McIlroy has pointed out, is a further reminder that who exactly is represented is a significant factor of this image, but also, and perhaps more importantly, how they are represented through the medium of film. Films addressing 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland often develop narratives that make themselves most comfortable within the generic framework of the political thriller. How aptly accomplished or insightfully dealt with is another matter. Yet films such as *Patriot Games*, *Nothing Personal* (Thaddeus O'Sullivan, 1995), *Resurrection Man*, and *Hidden Agenda* (Ken Loach, 1990) all rest squarely within this genre. The convenient manner of systematically synthesising the culture into a pre-existing generic structure, and forcibly reshaping the various elements in order conform to the new form, risks losing its footing in reality.

Explicitly detailed in the novel itself, Cal is uneasy about this and the tendency to distance oneself from the reality at hand. He worries about his father because he 'knew that in his father's mind it was all a bit like the Westerns he so liked to watch on TV - that he had right on his side and it was the baddies who would die. He knew the old man felt safe with his notion and Cal did not want to disillusion him' (29). Like Francie Brady in *The Butcher Boy*, a film bearing many references to popular culture and specifically the

Western (a John Wayne film re-told through the eyes of an adolescent), Cal's father's engagement with this seemingly 'foreign' text allows for escape from his own circumstances, but also serves as an outlet for expressing himself.<sup>29</sup>

The generic structure of the Western also functions in a similar way to that of the political thriller under which so many films set in Northern Ireland could be categorised: a clearly defined narrative structure, which relies on the division between the good guys and bad guys, in order to lead to the satisfying resolution of the good guy winning. In a structure which insists there *must* be delineation between the two, it becomes crucial onto which side of the narrative categorisation each falls. As an explicit point made in the narrative by Cal's worry about his dad and cowboy films, outside the diegesis of the story, it suggests the narrative's own resistance to such a framework.

However, rather than confront the form of representation directly, *Cal* side-steps this issue by developing its narrative out of a love story upon which 'the political' is grafted. The iconography is explicit, and overwhelms the characters not because it divides them, but because of its power to subsume the individual. Although Shamie's interest in Westerns is not explicit in the film, the presence of television and newscasts is central to their home life. *Lamb* also makes reference to Westerns, but only briefly and to less effect. Owen watches a Western in a hotel room. We do not see the actual film, but hear the shoot-out and see the images flickering across his absorbed expressionless face. Perhaps not altogether dissimilar from Shamie's interest in the Western, the genre functions here as an extension of childhood fantasy where Owen's own adventures might be imaginatively acted out.

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<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Butler Cullingford offers a detailed analysis of the Irish identification with the American Western in *Ireland's Others: Gender and Ethnicity in Irish Literature and Popular Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001). Cullingford makes reference to another text mentioned in this thesis, *The Snapper*, for its alignment with the Western. In particular, she points to the father singing Western songs, but also reoccurring visual motifs borrowed from Western films (p. 186).

Although McIlroy accuses a series of films, including *Cal*, of only telling us 'half of the tragic story',<sup>30</sup> several critics have praised *Cal* for its subtle narration. At the Cannes festival, where the film premiered, MacLaverty recalled talking to people after the screening who felt it was supporting something different. Still, perhaps the subtlety of the narrative is more evident in the novel. For instance, when Cal and his father are burned out of their house, in a predominantly Protestant neighbourhood, a woman consoles Shamie and says 'It makes you ashamed to be a Protestant' (p. 75). Her expression of solidarity stresses her identity as a 'civilian' before anything else - an identity McIlroy finds many narratives deny Protestants. However, in the film, in this particular scene, it is not so clear. Cal runs to find Shamie and a crowd of neighbours surrounding the burning house and although the concerned neighbour is present, her identity is not as explicit as she cries to Shamie: 'I'm ashamed. I'm ashamed.' Some of the explicitness of the novel is possibly given up due to the explicitness of the image.

In *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film*, Linda Seger describes the scene in *Gone With the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939) when Atlanta is burned, by looking at both novel and film. She recognises an inherent difference in the way in which they deal with the same subject matter. In short, she praises the film's ability to convey a wealth of detail in a short space of time. However, she remarks that no matter how efficient the film may be in this regard, it is never able to relay information in as detailed a manner as the novel without seeming awkward. For Seger, ultimately, this scene in the film version creates 'a sense of the sweep of the story, the excitement, terror, fear, panic...' etc., whereas the novel portrays all this as well as a 'new understanding of the historical period—the context, the meaning of the battles, and the strategy of both Sherman and the Confederate generals Johnston and Hood'.<sup>31</sup> The details of the house-burning scene in *Cal* also lack the

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<sup>30</sup> McIlroy, *Shooting to Kill*, p. 69.

<sup>31</sup> Linda Seger, *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1992), pp. 21-22.

ability to be as particular and pointed in the film. In the screen adaptation, a spectator might be able to infer from the scene that the consoling neighbour is Protestant, but more likely, the rapidity of the detailing of the disaster's events will have swept away an important but relatively small detail.

The constraints of the medium of film need not be solely to blame for a flattening of representation on screen. Although John Hill, pointing to films such as *Angel* and *Cal*, has argued that cinema has failed to express an 'ability to respond intelligently to history, and the willingness to engage with economic, political and cultural complexity'.<sup>32</sup> However, he generally attributes this to a pull towards commercial success. Certainly, the marketing of *Cal* abroad influenced the way in which 'The Troubles' were represented. One of the film's producers, David Puttnam, in a letter to the distributors, Warner Brothers, who were in the process of promoting his last film, *Local Hero*, for its video rental potential in the US, anticipates the problems marketing *Cal*, and emphasises the necessity to play down the terrorism and place 'people not issues' at the forefront.<sup>33</sup> Puttnam's approach seem to add weight to Brian McIlroy's critique of the industry's limited registers for representing Catholic and Protestant Northern Ireland: 'A more traditional approach to joint representation or apparent parity of esteem is to adopt the Romeo and Juliet storyline'.<sup>34</sup> Ironically, even the creation of a narrative image for *Cal*, billed as part of the 'First Love' television series, was carefully plotted to avoid too many overt references to 'The Troubles' and place more emphasis on the romance narrative. There were even suggestions to change posters for foreign release.

In one letter to MacLaverty, Susan Richards writes that 'it does not help foreign distributors to easily recognise the nature of the film' and that what is represented is best

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<sup>32</sup> John Hill, 'Images of Violence', Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons, John Hill, *Cinema and Ireland* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988), pp. 147-193: 184.

<sup>33</sup> BFI: David Puttnam Archive.

<sup>34</sup> McIlroy, *Shooting to Kill*, p. 59.

kept symbolic (i.e. an Orangeman with drums is a better way of depicting locality than representing direct physical violence).<sup>35</sup> The symbolism that Richards encourages is something visibly developed in the film. In a review of the novel in the *Sunday Times*, David Lodge remarked that in *Lamb* (the novel) the symbolism was obtrusive, whereas in *Cal* there is no symbolism. It is this absence of symbolism in the novel that Lodge feels 'seem[s] to be waiting for a film director to give the intensity the words have failed to evoke'.<sup>36</sup> Lodge's challenge appears to be taken on board in the film version of *Cal*, but rather than developing the symbolism as a method of representing where words fail or fall short, the filmmaker's tactics invoke the symbolism to opposite effect, and seem intent upon employing symbolism to quieten the words down. Or, in other words, the metaphor or symbol is used to avoid depicting an unpalatable reality and what is offered in its place is a further abstraction of the narrative. The result is perhaps what Cleary has caustically referred to as the reductive 'romance across the divide' narrative – privileging the personal over the political.

Pat O'Connor, the director of *Cal*, has made nearly a dozen films to date, several of which are set in Ireland. Most recently, he adapted Brian Friel's stage play, *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1998). *Circle of Friends* (1995), also an adaptation, was based on the novel by Maeve Binchy<sup>37</sup>, and other films such as *Fools of Fortune* (1989), a film about the Irish war of independence, and two shorts, *The Ballroom of Romance* and *One of Ourselves* (1983), which also deal directly with Ireland. Although each film may require a different treatment of the setting depending on the nature of the narrative, it is possible to trace a 'vision' of Ireland explored through the work of O'Connor's films which draws on the tension between urban modernity and romanticised rural settings.

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<sup>35</sup> Letter from Susan Richards to Bernard MacLaverty, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1982, BFI: David Puttnam archive.

<sup>36</sup> David Lodge, Review of *Cal*, *The Sunday Times* (see David Puttnam Archive, BFI).

<sup>37</sup> Maeve Binchy, *Circle of Friends* (London: Coronet, 1991).



*Circle of Friends* shares many similarities with *Cal*. Set in Ireland in the late 1940s and 1950s, *Circle of Friends* sets up dynamic relations between rural Ireland and Dublin. The film begins with the sound of a flute, and like *Cal*, a journey to and from the city always affords the opportunity for picturesque shots of the landscape accompanied by folk music employed nostalgically. Like the novel, the narrative appears to be looking back in order to create an idealised past, favouring a focus on personal relationships over the novel's examination of religion. In her essay 'From History to Heritage', Ruth Barton identifies films that seek to offer an alternative to those preoccupied with political issues - or an exacting realism she likens to the Heritage film.<sup>38</sup> In this way, it may be compared to other films which challenge more urban-realist cinematic attempts which were seen as displacing narratives depicting an idealised and sentimental Ireland. Although it could be identified as the appearance of shared preoccupation in all narratives representing Ireland and Northern Ireland, the way in which O'Connor handles divisions in both narratives between rural and urban landscapes suggests an additional influence.

Margaret Scanlan has remarked on the representation of Northern Ireland in *Cal* as setting an impossible love affair 'within an almost flatly realistic social context'.<sup>39</sup> Certainly the Oedipal affair of Marcella and Cal at times reaches mythical proportions, but as Scanlan points out, the context is socially realistic. In other words, the narrative structure representing a man killing a woman's husband, falling in love with the woman, and then through his heavy sense of guilt, and a series of revelations, coming to terms with the consequences, is mythic. However, the context of this narrative, located in the very real environment of the troubles of Northern Ireland, resists such an interpretation.

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<sup>38</sup> Ruth Barton, 'From History to Heritage: Some Recent Developments in Irish Cinema', *The Irish Review*, no. 21, 1997, pp. 41-56.

<sup>39</sup> Scanlan, 'The Unbearable Present', p. 150.

### *The role of music*

*Cal* explores images of rural, idyllic Ireland in contrast to those of a cold, industrial, violent one. The line between the two worlds becomes a point of terror for Cal as he imagines the possibilities of violent outbreaks such as drive-by shootings in a seemingly mundane environment. This tension is produced in the film through the interspersing of violent flashbacks with tranquil, everyday scenes. Often reinforced by non-diegetic musical motifs, the film seems to take even further the favourable depictions of rural areas in MacLaverty's novel. The diegetic music of *Cal* consists mainly of blues songs Cal listens to on his cassette player or sings to himself. The music is written into the original novel like other stories that have been adapted to film such as *The Commitments*. As in *The Commitments*, the music in *Cal* is not merely a filmic device, but acts on a larger scale than simply carrying the soundtrack and forms an integral part of the story.

In the novel, there are many references to music. Cal plays the guitar and sings the blues song, 'Born Under a Bad Sign.' He listens to *The Rolling Stones* and thinks about the *Pink Floyd* track 'Dark Side of the Moon' when he is trying to tell Crilly he wants out. Like his use of French swearwords in the novel, it is a way of individualising his own experience by appropriating cultures from outside his own.<sup>40</sup> Lauren Onkey has described the role of blues music in *Cal* as twofold; on a structural level, the music reinforces Cal's representation as a victim, but also through connecting with an outside group it functions as a way in which Cal carves out his own space in Northern Ireland<sup>41</sup>.

Narratively speaking, music is a minimal feature of *Lamb*. Michael and Owen have a radio for their room in order to listen to Radio Eireann just in case something has evolved in the search for them. Occasionally they listen to rock music, and once Owen even switches the

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<sup>40</sup> Although Cal's use of swearwords does not make an appearance in the film version, these features of the narrative are expressed in alternative ways. For instance, in one scene in particular, Marcella invites Cal up to the house while the rest of the family is away, to share a meal. The interactions between the two, Marcella's descriptions of Italy and a moment when she instructs Cal on how to eat spaghetti, relay a similar meaning to that of the novel.

<sup>41</sup> Lauren Onkey, 'Celtic Soul Brothers', *Eire-Ireland*, Fall 1993, pp. 147-158.

dial over from ceilidh music to rock, but in comparison to *Cal* the influence of music on the narrative is not remarkable. However, because Van Morrison composed the score for the film, music becomes important in a different sense. The music is present throughout a significant portion of the film, but is not constructed in a similar way to that of *Cal*'s urban and rural musical juxtapositions. For the most part the contemporary score remains thematically consistent throughout, with a few exceptions, most notably the appearance of U2's hit 'In the Name of Love' playing in the pub scene when Michael first meets up with Haddock. Predictably, Van Morrison's name attached to the film lent a significant hand to its marketing. For example, the jacket of the video includes two names, Liam Neeson, the lead actor, and Van Morrison, the composer. Missing are the names of director Colin Gregg and writer Bernard MacLaverty.

Considering Brian McIlroy's comments, it is important to note that many critics praised *Cal*, the novel, for its narration. More specifically, Stephen Watt has aligned the efforts of the novel with projects such as the Field Day Theatre Company because of its attempt to offer representations of Ireland that are demythologised.<sup>42</sup> Rather than opting to replace familiar myths with new ones in an act of avoidance, MacLaverty's narrative works in constant negotiation between the two, confronting the problem directly. Dietmar Böhnke has identified this dilemma in his study of James Kelman, arguing that the replacement of Scottish kailyard with grittier, urban narratives coined as 'anti-kailyard' is said to involve 'the danger of becoming, through the detachment of Scottishness, as isolated, changeless and closed as the Kailyard itself.'<sup>43</sup> In *Cal*, this binary relation created between pastoral landscapes and urban dwellings may appear to accentuate the mythological representations of Ireland. In a sense, it is recognising the danger of replacing old myths with new ones,

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<sup>42</sup> Stephen Watt, 'The Politics of Bernard MacLaverty's *Cal*', *Éire-Ireland*, Fall 1993, pp. 130-146.

<sup>43</sup> Dietmar Böhnke, *Kelman Writes Back: Literary Politics in the Work of a Scottish Writer* (Gliencke, Berlin: Galda und Wilch, 1999), p. 37.

and instead offers a more complex representation through the contrasting and blurring of these myths.

In other words, O'Connor's deliberate utilisation of Irish folk music and extreme long shots of open land in order to signify a movement to an idyllic, rural landscape is necessary when contrasted with urban scenes. Similarly, this is a technique taken up in recent Scottish films such as Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher* (1999), which oscillates between tenement buildings of Glasgow during a 1970s refuse workers' strike and the open countryside that is visited by the main character, a young boy. Central to the narrative is the boy's anticipation of being moved into a new home by the council. Aimlessly boarding a bus and staying on until the end of the journey, he comes across a house being built. Like *Cal*, *Ratcatcher* deems the mythologizing of the landscape a necessity. An essential part of the narrative, the binary between an urban realist and mythologized rural landscape lays bare the tensions surrounding the supposed seamlessness of character and culture.

In addition to the visual representation, like O'Connor, Ramsay also relies on the soundtrack, each journey into the country signalled by the inclusion of Scottish folk music. Stephen Watt identifies the soundtrack's employment in order to debunk various myths. For example, Cal's failure to identify with 'rebel songs' in exchange for his profound identification with American blues music is referred to by Watt as similar to Alan Parker's adaptation of Doyle's *The Commitments*.<sup>44</sup> This is evidenced in the film when Cal 'plays his guitar to a recorded version of the Booker T. Jones/William Bell classic "Born Under a Bad Sign"... Cal more readily identifies with the world of black music than with that of the nationalism of Pearse's poem or "The Croppy Boy", one of his deceased mother's favourite songs'.<sup>45</sup> However, connections could be made between the shared characteristics of the two forms of protest and lamentation. Cal's identification with one form over the other

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<sup>44</sup> Music also serves a similar function in *The Butcher Boy*. Francie's father is adept at playing the trumpet – more specifically Western tunes.

<sup>45</sup> Watt, 'The Politics of Bernard MacLaverty's *Cal*', p. 132.

creates a contrast between the diegetic and non-diegetic soundtrack, pitting one form against the other and ultimately informing the spectators' interpretation of the narrative. The music Cal identifies with is distinctly outside the realm of the 'soundtrack'. This is music he chooses to listen to in his own private space.

The non-diegetic music of the soundtrack consists of the anticipation-building discordant music which is associated with violence and the city as well as folk music which overlays idyllic shots of the landscape and, most importantly, occurs when Cal is physically involved with the land. Specifically, the music is prominent in scenes when Cal is chopping wood or picking potatoes on Marcella's family's farm. These moments are rare in that we see Cal in relation to his surroundings, pulling both him and the landscape into the frame. This is strikingly different from the fragmented shots throughout the majority of the film that aim to isolate him. This music is also associated with Marcella and emphasizes the romantic rather than political elements of the narrative.

This love story, fundamental to the narrative, lends itself additionally to metaphor through the use of music. When Cal examines the contents of Marcella's room, and again when they first kiss, the music refers back to the scenes of Cal within the landscape and implies what Margaret Scanlan identifies as a reference to 'Mother Ireland'.<sup>46</sup> In the novel, Cal refers to the house where Marcella lives as the 'earth' and the cottage he occupies as the 'moon'. This analogy further stresses Cal's alienation from Marcella, and perhaps even Ireland. Fidelma Farley has also pointed to the cottage as a further development of the 'Mother Ireland' trope. 'The home', Farley writes, 'often associated with the mother, is figured as a potential sanctuary, which cannot function as such because it is constantly invaded by hostile forces.'<sup>47</sup> Thus, the invasion of the cottage at the close of *Cal*, literally signifies the political dismantling of the domestic sphere. But Stephen Watt praises the

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<sup>46</sup> Scanlan, 'The Unbearable Present'.

<sup>47</sup> Fidelma Farley, 'Interrogating Myths of Maternity in Irish Cinema: Margo Harkin's *Hush-a-Bye Baby*', *Irish University Review*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1999, pp. 219-237: 230.

film for not offering 'yet one more idealisation of pastoral Ireland', instead providing a more complex representation of the Morton farm: 'connecting the quiet walks at the rural setting to the terrifying ones in town is a modern highway system that can transport sectarian violence right to the cottage's front door, as occurs twice in the novel. The cinematic style of O'Connor's film registers his understanding of this de-romanticising tendency in MacLaverty's novel.'<sup>48</sup>

### *The 'oral' vs. 'visual' culture debate*

In a recent essay on the cinematography of Thaddeus O'Sullivan, Cheryl Herr counters the notion of Ireland being a primarily oral culture rather than a visual one:

This stereotype, perpetuated more from within the country than from outside, found frequent indigenous media expression, and there can be no doubt that a certain early insecurity in mounting visual projects in Ireland resulted from the wide acceptance, or at least voicing, of this self-undermining message.<sup>49</sup>

What such claims about the strength of a culture suggest is that the oral culture marginalizes the existence of a visual culture. The notion that Ireland is an oral culture not only implies that Ireland has an inability to express itself visually, but alludes to it as defined by a *particular* oral culture, a mythologized verbal culture, which appears to be challenged in novels and particularly films such as *The Commitments* and *Cal*. Probably not the kind of oral culture Seamus Deane had in mind when he argued for the inclusion of songs and ballads in his conception of the orality of Irish literature.<sup>50</sup>

Although it is accepted that the origins of Irish literature (perhaps based in an oral tradition), does not exclude the influence of a visual culture within that tradition,<sup>51</sup> the

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<sup>48</sup> Watt, 'The Politics of Bernard MacLaverty's *Cal*', p. 135.

<sup>49</sup> Cheryl Temple Herr, 'Addressing the Eye in Ireland: Thaddeus O'Sullivan's *On a Paving Stone Mounted* (1978)', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2000, pp. 367-374.

<sup>50</sup> Seamus Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature* (London: Hutchinson, 1986).

<sup>51</sup> Even the language in Eavan Boland's poem 'The Oral Tradition' ironically relies on the visual to articulate the visual and is half torn between telling the story unfolding between the two women and

suggestion of an originary oral culture functions to divert attention from a visual one. Such assumptions could explain a particular fondness for adaptation in Irish filmmaking and could indicate that the existence of a prolific literary tradition within Ireland hinders visual industries. For instance, Luke Gibbons has described the strong literary tradition as resulting in making the visual 'obsolete'.<sup>52</sup> Even if the literary tradition in Ireland overshadows the success of the emergence of a visual one, it seems necessary to reassess the ways in which literary traditions are intertwined with visual ones.

Instead of approaching the two traditions as separate entities, it might be accepted that literary narratives are dependent on the visual and that the literary culture itself succeeds through a strong devotion to visual imagery. Filmmaking only represents an alternative method of expressing these images. The insistence that Ireland is not a visual culture risks overlooking the presence of powerful visual references. Particularly in adaptations, the already visual nature of the narrative in the written form becomes evident. MacLaverty's writings, for instance, transfer easily to film because of the manner in which the language clearly designates the visual. Both *Cal* and *Lamb* were produced in relative close time to one another, under similar circumstances, and suggest a growing acceptance of, or a gap bridged between the two media. On the one hand, this may be suggestive of the popularity of Irish literature and a commercial desire to seize upon and extend the reaches of such a successful form. However, it is also representative of the existence of a visual culture, or more specifically, a national film culture.

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depicting the impressionist scene surrounding them. See Peter Fallon and Derek Mahon (eds.), *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry* (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 264-266.

<sup>52</sup> Luke Gibbons, 'Word and Image: The Resistance to Vision', *Graph: Irish Literary Review*, no. 2, 1987, 2-3.

## 2. Patrick McCabe: *The Butcher Boy*

Declan Kiberd describes the portrayal of childhood in literature as a metaphor for the nation: 'The writer typically began the autobiography as a subject in the colony, clashed with and surmounted a father, and ended as a citizen of a free state or of a state intent on freeing itself'.<sup>1</sup> Kiberd's insight goes a long way towards explaining the significance of Neil Jordan's adaptation of Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* (1997)<sup>2</sup> and its reception and interpretation as a central metaphor for the progressive future of Irish cinema, developing a voice of its own – distinct from Hollywood and British cinema. In two of the most recent book-length studies on the subject, *The Butcher Boy* has provided a centre-piece for the focus of discussion. Martin McLoone's book, bearing an image from Jordan's film on its cover, makes reference to the film throughout, and offers an in-depth reading in the final chapter.<sup>3</sup> Lance Pettitt also concludes his study with a close analysis of the film.<sup>4</sup> Part of its popularity amongst several critics (in addition to Pettitt and McLoone) could be attributed to the film's narrative which, as McLoone suggests, 'provides plenty of ammunition for both a revisionist and an anti-revisionist reading of Ireland's trauma'.<sup>5</sup> But the use of the film as metaphor has been evidenced not only in relation to Ireland, but Irish cinema specifically. While Pettitt and McLoone explore the film's version of Ireland, they also hold the film up as an example and, even further, see the narrative workings of this one film's complex and often troubled look at childhood, as framing the future of progressive representation of Irish cinema.

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<sup>1</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> McCabe and Jordan – who is also an accomplished writer in addition to his successes as a director – jointly penned the screenplay. McCabe adapted the novel while Jordan scripted additional scenes for the film version.

<sup>3</sup> Martin McLoone, *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (London: BFI, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Pettitt, *Screening Ireland*.



*The Butcher Boy* is the first of McCabe's trilogy of novels, all bearing his characteristic phantasmagoric style.<sup>6</sup> *The Dead School*, his second novel, was referred to by one reviewer as 'death on a laugh-support machine',<sup>7</sup> further reflecting the author's commitment to revealing the precarious line trod between the everyday and the fantastic. Similarly, *The Butcher Boy* offsets the emotionally violent narrative of a young boy, Francie, who butchers his meddling female neighbour, with its descent into hyper-reality - a plot which easily lends itself to McCabe's own delicious brand of black humour. A narrative detailing a young boy's possibly schizophrenic<sup>8</sup> musings and personal interpretations of events, it has been described by reviewers and critics as the 'social fantastic', a narrative that 'starts out as "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" and ends up as "Frankenstein"', and finally, 'bog gothic'.<sup>9</sup> In an interview, McCabe endorsed the description of his writing as 'social fantastic', rather than 'poetic realism', and offered his own description of his novel as bearing a 'Hogarthian cartoon-type quality'.<sup>10</sup>

### *Narrative grotesque*

Indicative of the reviewers' descriptions, a sharp-edged tension is generated between two narrative components: the unassuming tale of a young boy growing up, and the dark portrait of a violent act of murder. It is the discordance of the two subjects which ironically generates both humour and horror. Adapted and released as a film shortly after

<sup>5</sup> McLoone, *Irish Film*, p. 220-221.

<sup>6</sup> McCabe, also an accomplished playwright, wrote a stage version of *The Butcher Boy*, 'Frank Pig Says Hello'.

<sup>7</sup> Tom Adair, 'Masterclass in Human Relations Without a Happy Ending', *Scotland on Sunday*, 4 June, 1995, p. S13.

<sup>8</sup> Clare Wallace, in her essay 'Running Amuck: Manic Logic in Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*', *Irish Studies Review*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1998, pp. 157-163, explores the role of madness and its relationship to society in McCabe's novel.

<sup>9</sup> Patrick McCabe, describing the critics' descriptions in Christopher FitzSimon's 'St Macartan, Minnie the Minx and Mondo Movies: Elliptical Peregrinations Through the Subconscious of a Monaghan Writer Traumatized by Cows and the Brilliance of James Joyce', *Irish University Review*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1998, pp. 175-189: 176; Andrew O'Hehir, 'Boy Monster', <http://www.salon.com/ent/movies/1998/04/10butcher.html>; Ann Hornaday, 'Horrific, witty "Butcher Boy"', [http://www.sunspot.net/our\\_town/film/data/thebutcherboy.html](http://www.sunspot.net/our_town/film/data/thebutcherboy.html).

the Jonesboro shootings, in which two young boys went on a shooting spree at their school in Arkansas, culturally the narrative's reception becomes even more problematic and complex. It would be difficult to imagine a spectator at the time of the film's release failing to place the film within this cultural context, when many debates surrounding youth and violence were circulating through various media. Roger Ebert recalls viewing Neil Jordan's film version of *The Butcher Boy* and discovering that 'by the end of the film, when he acts out his murderous fantasies, I was thinking of course about the shooting spree by the two young boys in Jonesboro'. Nevertheless, Ebert found the film 'in a sense, optimistic. It suggests that children must undergo years of horrible experiences before they turn into killers'.<sup>11</sup> Still, a subject of poignant relevance at the time must intensify the experience for the spectator. The narrative's dark humour would in effect drastically reduce comfort levels, especially when dealing with humour that stemmed from a horror of such a topical nature.

Charlotte O'Sullivan argued in her review in *Sight and Sound* that the film has such great impact because it worked at the interface between an imagined childhood innocence and adult obsession with violence. She writes: 'In this cynical age of market license and moral panics, children continue to represent the innocence we believe we have lost.'<sup>12</sup> Adding to this disturbance, it is precisely Francie's performance of the role of an 'innocent' child that affords him the opportunity to abuse his power. In his relations with his neighbours and the clergy of the industrial school, Francie taps into the society's general belief that - as Father Sullivan preaches to the school (in the film version) - the 'soul of a child is the purest of all'. As the narrative progresses, Francie's visions, accepted and celebrated by those around him, secure a position of power for him in the school as a link to God, rationalised by the Fathers as the result of a youthful and pure heart.

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<sup>10</sup> FitzSimon, 'St Macartan, Minnie the Minx and Mondo Movies', p. 175.

<sup>11</sup> Roger Ebert, 'The Butcher Boy', *Chicago Sun-Times*, from [http://www.suntimes.com/ebert/ebert\\_reviews/1998/04/041701.html](http://www.suntimes.com/ebert/ebert_reviews/1998/04/041701.html).

Adding to the sensitive nature of narratives dealing with violence and childhood is the unexpected use of the context in which it is placed. The loss of innocence O'Sullivan speaks of is expressed through the film's frequent nostalgic reflections back to the 1960s, which generally mourn the loss of community and the strength of the nuclear family – not the threat of nuclear war - and afford spectators the opportunity to re-examine their own childhood in a celebratory way. *The Butcher Boy* does not allow such an opportunity to occur. Rather, it forces us to re-examine the degree of nostalgia with which we tend to look back, calls attention to the fallibility and instability of the family, and scrutinises the myth of innocence. The violence becomes a means by which to accurately debunk misguided nostalgia. The film's release coinciding with the Jonesboro shootings was perhaps unfortunate in terms of its delayed release and reception at the box office, because the film poignantly explores real problems in society.

The real terror results from Jordan's positioning of the spectator. Encouraged to identify with Francie, through his eyes we see and accept the violence as justified. Jordan sees the violence amongst children as very real, having witnessed children torturing others close to death in his own youth, and denounces them as 'fucking monsters'.<sup>13</sup> O'Sullivan aptly points out that 'Clearly not all violence is *necessary* for Jordan -- only violence that goes against the grain, that resists the herd mentality'.<sup>14</sup> Jordan is arguably not condoning violence in *The Butcher Boy*, nor is he reflecting it as *necessary*, only necessary in order to accurately convey a vision of culture that is difficult to accept. O'Sullivan explains Jordan's film as 'Celebrating a homicidal child's crimes',<sup>15</sup> but rather than wholly triumphant the film's double-edged humour leaves, in the wake of Francie's murderous act, a twinge of guilt. Like the Jonesboro shootings and later those at Columbine High, what is

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<sup>12</sup> Charlotte O'Sullivan, 'Massacre of the Innocents', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1998, pp. 10-12.

<sup>13</sup> O'Sullivan, 'Massacre of the Innocents', p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> O'Sullivan, 'Massacre of the Innocents', p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> O'Sullivan, 'Massacre of the Innocents', p. 12.

clear after the blame has been bounced from various facets of popular culture (i.e. slasher movies, Westerns, comic books, and Marilyn Manson) is that it always points back at ourselves. Michael Moore in *Bowling for Columbine* (2002) asks Marilyn Manson what he would have said to the children who carried out the shootings in the Colorado high school, and Manson replies: 'I wouldn't say a single word to them. I would listen to what they have to say. And that's what no one did.' What these events, and the story of Francie Brady illustrate, is the damage resulting from our own fantasies about childhood and a failure to engage with reality. Other narratives have also addressed similar issues. Roddy Doyle's *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* told through the eyes of a ten year old boy, confronts the cruelty of childhood head on, in an un-romanticised telling common to contemporary child-centred narratives.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, Doyle's *A Star Called Henry* offers an uncensored insight into what a child would think rather than what an adult would like to think a child would think.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Traumatised by Joyce***

McCabe's own brand of literary pyrotechnics seems derivative of other forms of writing exploring psychological realities in a mythical way, such as the work of James Joyce. Both writers accept the validity of an internal, subjective reality through their characters' humanistic portrayals. In many ways, the psychological portraits become fantastic in Joyce's *Ulysses*, particularly in the 'Circe' chapter where fantasy and reality blend into a representative illustration of the experiences of Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus. Even more specific connections may be made between Joyce's Stephen, who refuses to pray as his mother wished at her death bed (p.4),<sup>18</sup> and McCabe's Francie, who suffers

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<sup>16</sup> Roddy Doyle, *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1993). All further references will be to this edition.

<sup>17</sup> Roddy Doyle, *A Star Called Henry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999). All further references will be to this edition.

<sup>18</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: The Bodley Head Ltd, 1964). All further references to *Ulysses* are to this edition.

emotionally from the belief that he is 'a bad and wicked and evil man...' who 'broke (his) mother's heart didn't even go to the poor woman's funeral' (p. 203).

In addition to the similarities between characters, stylistically the novel's representations of reality are dealt with in a comparable fashion. Reality, as shared between the characters of the narrative, becomes less important, and also becomes difficult to distinguish from the fantasy belonging to the characters who act as the mediator between ourselves and the story world. As a result, the imagined reality holds equal importance to what might be real. In the novel, Francie slips with great frequency between fantasy and reality, and often the two are meshed indistinguishably together. In these instances, his own inner world, brought into the real one of the story, leaves the reader in doubt as to the reliability of the boy's narrative, while still forcing them to surrender to it.

Referring to the title of the interview, 'St Macartan, Minnie the Minx and Mondo Movies: Elliptical Peregrinations Through the Subconscious of a Monaghan Writer Traumatized by Cows and the Brilliance of James Joyce', Christopher FitzSimon agrees that he can understand the traumatising effect of cows, but questions McCabe about his feelings of being traumatised by the 'brilliance' of James Joyce. McCabe recalls first reading *The Dubliners* and being awestruck by 'the sheer brilliance, the art of Joyce made it seem so contemporary, it was absolutely mindblowing'. In relation to his own writing at the time, McCabe describes wanting to stay away from 'bubbly, bubbly, kind of fishing-boat-bobbing-Irish-lilt stuff...' and wanting 'to get the intellectual of Joyce, the sheer vision of it, and combine that with humanity and language'.<sup>19</sup> The early influence of Joyce on McCabe's writing is evidenced thematically and stylistically in his novels, but may additionally suggest a link between both writers through a cinematic style of writing.

It was Joyce's cinematic writing style in *Ulysses* that drew the attention of filmmaker and critic Sergei Eisenstein, and prompted him to contact Joyce to discuss a possible film

adaptation. Although the project was never realised and, today, only a few rather unremarkable adaptations are in existence, a new version is in the process of being filmed by director Sean Walsh with Stephen Rea as Leopold Bloom.<sup>20</sup> Its apparent aversion to the cinema is more than likely the result of its subjective, stream-of-conscious narration being branded as ultimately unsuited to the medium. Adapted by American director Joseph Strick in 1967, on a relatively modest budget, the film version, attempting to encompass the entire narrative, never quite manages to convey the stream of consciousness narrative without flattening it out in its hurried narration. Richard Barsam, another critic unconvinced by the version's lack of depth in comparison to the original, has observed that the 'Circe' episode of the version - lasting forty minutes - is perhaps the most successful because of the dramatic format of the original.<sup>21</sup> Along similar lines, one could consider Joyce's only play, 'Exiles', a more obvious candidate for adaptation.<sup>22</sup>

However, it is misleading to suggest that the only possibility of successfully adapting Joyce would involve his more dramatically based works. As the successful adaptation of *The Butcher Boy* has proven, even the difficulty of representing internal narration can become a virtue to the filmmaker. Patrick McCabe expressed his own feelings that the narrative style was hardly an obstacle: '*The Butcher Boy* I felt would make a good movie. It's like *Huckleberry Finn*, you've got this sense of engagement with the world all the time.'<sup>23</sup> Rather than focus on the importance of internal or external narration, here McCabe makes a further distinction between characters that either connect or disengage with their environments. In this respect, a novel such as *Ulysses*, paradoxically identified as writing

<sup>19</sup> FitzSimon, 'St Macartan, Minnie the Minx and Mondo Movies', pp. 182-183.

<sup>20</sup> This version is now scheduled for release in 2004. For an interesting discussion of previous adaptations of *Ulysses* and the possibilities of Walsh's adaptation, see Shara Johnston, 'Immortals: Joyce, *Ulysses* and the Cinema', *The Drouth*, no. 4, 2002, pp. 8-12.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Barsam, 'When in Doubt Persecute Bloom', in Michael Klein and Gillian Parker (eds.), *The English Novel and the Movies* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co, 1981), pp. 291-300.

<sup>22</sup> James Joyce, *Exiles: A Play in Three Acts* (London: Cape, 1952).

<sup>23</sup> FitzSimon, 'St Macartan, Minnie the Minx and Mondo Movies', p. 189.

that is somehow cinematic and yet structurally resistant to the screen because of its internal narration, becomes an undeniably desirable candidate for adaptation.

Luke Gibbons, on the other hand has rendered any attempts at adapting the inventive and visual use of language in certain forms of Irish literature, including Joyce, as futile. He explains that instead of leaving a gap for the camera the language of Irish writing functions not 'to complement the visual but to **appropriate** it, to make it obsolete'.<sup>24</sup>

Gibbons adds emphasis to his argument by referring to Eisenstein's analysis of the particularly visual passages in Joyce as also being 'those where the style becomes "ultra-lyrical"', turning on the sounds and rhythms of the language. It is the very success in enclosing images within the cadences of verbal expression which makes it impossible to dispense with the words for purposes of film adaptation.<sup>25</sup> In Gibbons' analysis, it is precisely from the abstract and creative development of a visual image in written form that we derive pleasure in our reading. The fact that very little happens in *Ulysses* makes it difficult to adapt it to film. The inventive use of language, and the frequent explosion of intricate visual detail on the page, is at risk of being drowned in the all-encompassing lens of the camera. Or, even more often the case, the psychological, what one might not expect to see on film, is represented visually by the language on the page.

In the 'Sirens' chapter of *Ulysses* the experience of chamber music, likened to going to the toilet, is described as

Tinkling. Empty vessels make most noise. Because the acoustics, the resonance changes according as the weight of the water is equal to the law of falling water. Like those rhapsodies of Liszt's Hungarian, gipsyeyed. Pearls. Drops. Rain. Diddle iddle addle addle oodle oodle. Hiss. Now. Maybe now. Before. (p.364)

Several images confront the reader in this passage. The description of chamber music, in effect, edits together a series of different impressions, all varying independent of any

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<sup>24</sup> Gibbons, 'Word and Image', p. 2.

particular given space. Psychologically representative, it details the internal processing of outside stimulation and its relation to memory. Oddly, the aural becomes visual. We first, rather naturally, are introduced to the instrument, 'the empty vessel', the sound of which is likened to the sound of urination. The actual music it is compared to is then personified as being 'gipsyeyed', which is then associated with a series of visual images – 'Pearls. Drops. Rain' - followed by an onomatopoeic use of words. Throughout *Ulysses*, this rhythm of words generates a meaning of its own, but additionally, the juxtaposition of words becomes indicative of the visual.

In *The Butcher Boy* Francie's use of language is equally important. When Francie is listening to music it is an escape, not altogether dissimilar from Joyce's description of music. The music allows Francie to imaginatively explore and cut through various spaces:

It surged, it was music with wings. Bird Who Soars Music and what it said was nothing bad would ever happen again. It filled me with such ecstasy I skimmed the chimney pots over the town crying out for da and ma to tell them. Its going to be all right after all I cried. I could see the snowdrop on the ditch with my bird's eye. The children were blobs of colour clumping about in enormous shoes below in the lane, setting the toy tea-things on a wooden crate. I spun sideways and the black hole that had been in the pit of my stomach was full of light. I landed on a branch and watched him for a minute. (p. 145)

In this dream sequence Francie is able to soar above everything, viewing the world from a distant perspective. It has a cartoon quality that could easily be compared to Joyce or Flann O'Brien. But what is most obviously a shared characteristic is the way in which a real event (the playing of music) is transmuted into a series of fantastic impressions, offering a sequence of visual images.

Luke Gibbons also pointed to the connections Eisenstein makes between Dickens and Zola and the general urban environment arising from modernity, which expressed 'a cinematic idiom even before the invention of film'.<sup>25</sup> Although Joyce, writing at the time of cinema's

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<sup>25</sup> Gibbons, 'Word and Image', p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Gibbons, 'Word and Image', p 2.



birth and technological growth, was keenly inspired by the medium, his style resembles the new medium because of shared circumstances emblematic of the time. He does not write with a conventional cinematic voice. Instead, he writes under a similar set of conditions and concerns, and experiments with methods indirectly expressive of the constraints of the new medium. Joyce's writing takes on a spatial quality reminiscent of Eisenstein's own explorations through his theory of montage.

Still, critical responses to successful adaptations of Joyce, such as John Huston's *The Dead* or Mary Ellen Bute's *Passages from Finnegans Wake*, continue to suggest mild disappointment even at the strongest of efforts, and often conclude that although Joyce may write in a cinematic fashion, the reader's involvement in the construction of the mental image is a crucial factor and 'in film, on the contrary, the picture is not created by the viewer's imagination, but is presented to him as an immutable image'.<sup>27</sup> As Frank Pilipp notes here in his analysis of *The Dead*, the camera does, indeed, by the very nature of its form 'show' what happens – whereas novels 'tell'.<sup>28</sup> However, successfully constructed narrative cinema often calls upon other means of narration to supplement what the camera 'shows' and its ability to construct meaning is not as simplified as Pilipp's criticisms imply. Likewise, the 'reading' of the film is not so different from that of the novel; contrary to Pilipp's argument the spectator is hardly at the mercy of the fixed nature of the image. Films, like novels, lodge themselves in the minds of the spectator where various meanings and narrative constructs result. Pilipp also points out the inefficiency of the voice-over, or internal monologue, in representing the indirect narrative approach in the novella, condemning it for only having the capacity to state directly what is indirectly implied in written form. However, Pilipp maintains that 'the film cannot dispense with the voice-over. On the one hand, Joyce's language is simply too rich and loaded with allegory and

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<sup>27</sup> Frank Pilipp, 'Narrative Devices and Aesthetic Perception in Joyce's and Huston's "The Dead"', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1993, pp. 61-68: 66.

symbolism to be adequately mediated through images only.<sup>29</sup> Pilipp might wish for Huston to dispense with voice-over and other supposedly 'un-cinematic' crutches of adaptation in *The Dead*, but at the same time he recognizes the impossibility of this occurrence. Again, it is the perception that the voice-over is literal and loses the depth of a novel's narrator that fails to recognize their possible benefits (i.e. the irony generated by its questioning of the reliability of word and image).

Even if these devices are given over to devices thought of as 'purely' cinematic, critics feel there has been a loss of the language of Joyce. In the case of Bute's adaptation of *Finnegans Wake*, one critic's complaints stemmed exactly from the abandonment of literary devices in exchange for the purely cinematic. Observing that 'occasionally a film that fails to do what it attempts can tell us something profound about the nature of cinema', Sarah Smith begins her essay by maintaining that although Bute's film preserves 'ideas and images from Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, it gives them a radically different, indeed opposed meaning; it misrepresents the work'.<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, from the verbal puns, to the erratic methods of reading Joyce, to the impossibilities of expressing simultaneity, Smith concludes that with the existing technology, *Finnegans Wake* 'will never be adapted to film'.<sup>31</sup> As is evident in Smith's evaluation, the criticism of pre-existing adaptations of Joyce reveals a general malaise in the cinema's use of literary devices and vice versa, the cinema's inability to translate the literary devices. In some respects this could be seen as an obstacle for filmmakers, but more accurately it is a failure of the critics to fully recognise and understand the capabilities of cinema and let go of certain notions tied to a

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<sup>28</sup> Colin MacCabe discusses this phenomenon in 'Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses' in *Theoretical Essays: Film, Linguistics, Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 42: 10.

<sup>29</sup> Pilipp, 'Narrative Devices and Aesthetic Perception', p. 65.

<sup>30</sup> Sarah W.R. Smith, 'The Word Made Celluloid: On Adapting Joyce's *Wake*', *The English Novel and the Movies* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co, 1981), pp. 301-312.

<sup>31</sup> Smith, 'The Word Made Celluloid', p. 312. However, Bute's film was highly regarded, winning Best First Feature at Cannes. See Kit Basquin's review for a more positive response, in *James*

'literary' Joyce. If 'true' (i.e. literal) simultaneity is what Smith feels is required, she need only look to the work of contemporary filmmakers who employ the use of split screen. Mike Figgis' *Timecode* (2000), divided into four frames of simultaneous action, is one obvious example.

The use of spoken word in film is all too often dismissed. But it is difficult to overlook its successful use in many films. Eisenstein, who pioneered many of the visual techniques of film through his theory of montage, said that: 'The true material for the sound film is, of course, the monologue.'<sup>32</sup> However, with specific regard to Joyce, it may seem unusual that Patrick McCabe, clearly and admittedly influenced by Joyce, would write in a style that lends itself well to film. McCabe's writing, on the other hand, is born years later, after the dust of modernity has settled, leaving behind a distinct set of cinematic conventions. These McCabe explores quite literally. McCabe is drawing from a rich pool of material from other, well developed media. In *The Butcher Boy* Francie Brady adopts many voices tapped from popular culture. So does Joyce. Like Joyce, it is a kind of writing whose primary stylistic function is a pastiche of various popular media including radio, cartoons, music hall, television and film. In this respect, an adaptation of *The Butcher Boy* involves tracking the links from visual media, to literature, and back again.

### ***Francie and the disembodied voice***

McCabe's succinct rendering of Francie's voice was only employed in a second draft, after the first draft's narration in third person was deemed by McCabe to be merely 'a workmanlike effort but it wasn't enough'.<sup>33</sup> Jordan's adept rendering of the subjective narration comes as no surprise considering previous successful representations of the

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*Joyce's Finnegans Wake: A Casebook* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1991), pp. 177-187.

<sup>32</sup> S.M. Eisenstein, 'An American Tragedy', *Close Up*, no. 10, June 1933, p. 123, as cited in Robert A. Armour, 'The "Whatness" of Joseph Strick's Portrait', Klein and Parker (eds.), *The English Novel and the Movies*, p. 281.

<sup>33</sup> McCabe quoted in Keith Hopper, 'A Wasp in the Flowers', *Film West*, no. 30, 1997, pp. 34-36: 35.

internal narrative voice on screen. Additionally, Jordan has since adapted Graham Greene's highly internal novel, *The End of the Affair* (2000), by devising the script in an unconventional way that allows each viewpoint of a romantic relationship to be represented, by actually showing events twice. Likewise, *The Company of Wolves* (1984), adapted from a short story by Angela Carter, draws on filmic conventions to demonstrate the literary. The fairytale quality of the original version, embodied in the narration of the fairytales to Rosaleen by her grandmother, are taken up and completed by the narration of the camera, through a sort of flashback scenario. Even though a form of internal voice-over is avoided, towards the end of the film, the central character Rosaleen takes over the role of the storyteller from the now dead grandmother and tells a story of a wolf/girl to another wolf. Her story differs from the grandmother's in that it not only introduces the filmic narration, but continues with it, adding her own voice-over narration to the narrative image. *The Butcher Boy*, however, relies on voice-over to generate the novel's internal narration and stylistic feel.

Voice-over itself is something which tends to be avoided in adaptation, after years of its clichéd use in films, and its tendency to be used merely as a crutch, offering little in the way of artistic merit. Seymour Chatman in *Story and Discourse* considered why the use of voice-over is rarely employed in the cinema and concluded that 'since films *show* everything, off-screen voices in general have come to be thought obtrusive and inartistic, and those speaking in truncated syntax and free-associative patterns particularly so'.<sup>34</sup> In other words, if the use of speech is psychologically representative, natural and unrestricted, it is even less necessary to rely on the voice-over. Chatman's point reflects a general antipathy towards the use of voice-over and is emblematic of a consensus running through a history of film criticism stemming from cinema's need to distinguish itself as a new medium, separate from literature and literary devices such as the narrative voice. A disdain towards bringing the spoken word into film can be traced back to a general

aversion to the sound film or 'talkie' when it first made an appearance in the late 1920s.<sup>35</sup>

However, the continuing reaction against 'wordiness' arguably fails to take into account the increasing number of contemporary films whose success owes a great deal to an innovative use of the device.

The insistence upon defining film as a 'visual' medium, remarkable only in its visual qualities, deems Jordan's film to be a daring project, and led one reviewer to conclude that 'Jordan isn't scared of too many words'.<sup>36</sup> Still, the recent trend for film's innovative use of voice-over calls for a reconsideration of sound, and more specifically the spoken word's frosty reception from the industry. Kaja Silverman, Michel Chion and Sarah Kazloff are a few of the critics that have recognised the general disdain for voice-over not only in filmmaking practice, but in criticism, and have chosen to examine it more closely. In the prologue to *The Voice of the Cinema*, Chion explains a resistance to sound as generating from a fear of becoming too realistic at the expense of the imaginary; however, Chion notes that the use of voice-over is the least realistic use of sound.<sup>37</sup> In this respect, it would seem hopeful that it would be welcomed as a device, but instead, it was deemed a 'literary' device, a fate which was certain to render its use in filmmaking problematic.

Although *The Butcher Boy* involves dialogue representative of that which Chatman describes, the voice-over works successfully to join Francie's world to the spectator's own through a shared knowledge, and more importantly, it excludes the other characters of the narrative from this world. It offers what Sarah Kozloff has identified as advantages of the voice-over, namely a certain degree of intimacy and irony.<sup>38</sup> As a result, the use of voice-

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<sup>34</sup> Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 194.

<sup>35</sup> For an interesting discussion of early reactions against the sound film see Sarah Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers*.

<sup>36</sup> Leslie Dick, 'The Butcher Boy', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1998, p. 44.

<sup>37</sup> Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, ed. trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

<sup>38</sup> Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers*, p. 2.

over in *The Butcher Boy* works successfully to retain a subjective feel, and avoids the 'tacked-on' aspect of some voice-overs that exist because it was the only option or an easy one. The voice-over becomes a well-synthesised narrative component, enriching a post-modern narrative dealing with society's methods of incorporating various cultural texts.

Serving a double function, the voice-over on the one hand provides a mode of escape for Francie from his repressive surroundings. Paradoxically, the voice-over renders Francie a mere mouthpiece for the articulation of various cultural texts. John Scaggs has described this as an occurrence where 'a subject [is] presented with the status of object by his own de-culturing manoeuvres' and his/her control is usurped by the language he/she speaks (Scaggs crystallises this notion through his reiteration of Lacan's postulation that he does not *speak*, but is *spoken*).<sup>39</sup> In this manner, the film illustrates an act of ventriloquism, a voice colonised by television, film, comic books, and other modern media; it calls for reflection and for a reassessment of the role that they play in our daily lives.

In *Trainspotting*, Simon 'Sick Boy' Williamson likewise falls under the double bind of articulation through a media-friendly voice with his mimicry of Sean Connery. Similarly in Welsh's follow-up novel, *Porno*, Sick Boy's identification extends to Alex McLeish, the former manager of Hibernian football club (now manager of Glasgow Rangers).<sup>40</sup> In a new, devolved Scotland – a prominent focus of much of the novel – Sick Boy's obsessions with a Scottish superstar residing in Hollywood are overtaken by his entrepreneurial debates with key players in the new Scotland. Sick Boy's appropriation of voices, like Francie's, serve as a way of dealing with the outside world. Trying on different voices, Francie acts out scenarios from his thriving fantasy world. For instance, when he first enters the industrial school he declares it to be '*The Incredible School for Pigs! ... in [his] telly voice*' (p. 68). In the film, this is a voice that we hear as his own, but in a way that

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<sup>39</sup> John Scaggs, 'Who is Francie Pig? Self-Identity and Narrative Reliability in *The Butcher Boy*', *Irish University Review*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2000, pp. 51-58: 51 and 58.

mimics the television quality of the voice-over. The voice-over adopts itself as a pastiche of these qualities.

Chatman also mentions the task of adopting a voice-over to be an easy one requiring only matching an off-screen dialogue to an image of a character, but admits that the 'combination may evoke other meanings as well. Only the context can tell us whether it is indeed his interior monologue, or a soliloquy, or even a retrospective commentary on the action.'<sup>41</sup> The voice-over is rarely a convention which performs one function. In the context of *The Butcher Boy*, the adult male voice-over minimises the possibility that it is Francie's own present voice. In her article 'Space, Place and Nostalgia in British Youth Cinema', Karen Lury describes the use of voice-over in the adaptation of *Trainspotting* as designating 'the story both present and absent. On the one hand, the flow of speech promotes an impression of immediacy, while on the other hand its presence necessarily sets the events of the film in the past.'<sup>42</sup> Similar to *Trainspotting*, the voice-over in *The Butcher Boy* subtly distances the events through the use of an adult voice-over, while simultaneously serving a double function of comic book style commentator, or even more immediately, the role of Francie's alter ego. The device works paratextually, teetering on the fringes of the narrative, never entirely out of the digesis of the film and sometimes threatening to assume centrality.

The voice-over introduces us to the narrative from the opening of the film, suggesting its own privileged relationship with the filmmaker.<sup>43</sup> Differing from the use of the device in other films, the voice isn't attached to a body. Not until the film's close is the body tied to the voice identified by the camera as an older Francie Brady - throughout the majority of

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<sup>40</sup> Although in the novel he is manager of Hibernian football club, McLeish had switched sides by the time of the book's publication.

<sup>41</sup> Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, p. 195.

<sup>42</sup> Karen Lury, in 'Here and Then: Space, Place and Nostalgia in British Youth Cinema' from Robert Murphy (ed.), *British Cinema of the 90s* (London: BFI, 2000), pp. 100-108: 105.

<sup>43</sup> Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers*, p. 50.

the film we can only surmise that it is a retrospective voice, but are never entirely certain. The voice-over's commentary on Francie Brady's actions does speak in the first-person, but because there is a discrepancy between the visual image of the young boy and the older voice of the narration, we can only assume that it is connected - either an older Francie, or a sort of action/animation narration, a narrator assuming the 'I' in order to invoke excitement and urgency. Still, it is important that Francie is not clearly identified as the narrator from the outset. If it was clear that Francie was indeed the narrator, for example if the voice-over had been the voice of an adolescent, we would no longer consider it seriously, weighing it up against the images. Instead, it would risk being completely disregarded by the spectator as fanciful.<sup>44</sup>

Chion usefully illustrates the effect of the 'absent' narrator in his discussion of the origins of the word 'acousmate' by referencing Diderot's definition of 'acousmatiques'. These were students of Pythagoras, or 'uninitiated disciples' as Diderot describes them, who were indebted to 'spend five years in silence listening to their master speak behind the curtain, at the end of which they could look at him and were full members of the sect'.<sup>45</sup> Chion uses this example in order to explain the acousmatic presence of a voice that is unseen, but it also reflects directly on the role of the voice-over in *The Butcher Boy*. Like the instructors who deem it necessary to remain unseen - almost as if the mere presence of their image would confuse matters, or pollute the distillation of the facts - the narration resists the voice-over's identification with a physical body. Chion explicitly notes the magical powers invested in the unseen voice and correspondingly the final instance when the body is revealed, or the moment of 'deflowering' at which 'the voice loses its virginal-acousmatic powers, and re-enters the realm of human beings'.<sup>46</sup> In this light, it is necessary that the unveiling of the voice is delayed as long as possible, particularly in *The Butcher Boy* where

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<sup>44</sup> Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>45</sup> Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, p. 19.

<sup>46</sup> Chion, *The Voice of Cinema*, p. 23.



the connection of the voice-over to an older Francie Brady, in a mental institution, would be certain to affect the spectator's acceptance of the commentary. As Martin McLoone has suggested, the technique carries the potential to anger those who feel tricked into identifying with someone deemed mentally disturbed.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, Kaja Silverman, in response to Chion's work, remarked that any relation to the body would disturb the voice-over's authority. Widening this to include 'a regional accent', Silverman argues that its association with the narrative image may bring the narrator too close for any large degree of authority.<sup>48</sup> Is this because, for Silverman, the regional lacks authority? In the same way that Chatman perceives the 'truncated syntax' in the voice-over as 'obtrusive and inartistic'? Perhaps Silverman's comments reflect some truth in the way that the adoption of a regional voice-over departs from traditional notions of the 'transparent' voice-over. But rather than 'inartistic', the point of Francie's lengthy digressions, composed of fragmented and realistic speech patterns, is to call attention to itself (to be 'obtrusive'). *The Butcher Boy* is after all a film which fills the role of the Virgin Mary with a well-known rock star (with strong views on the Catholic Church), speaking in a regionalised accent, peppered with contemporary swear words.<sup>49</sup> In this manner, the film purposefully walks the thin line between gritty realism and pure fantasy, experimenting with the boundaries of each form. In these ways, the film engages with the very neuroses Silverman exposes, playing on the preconceptions of authority of image and voice – the contrast of what is seen and what is heard.

In any event, the voice-over is an integral part of the film version and functions in several different ways, generating uncertainty in the spectator's acceptance of various aspects of the visual narrative as truth. The gaps between what is seen and what is heard accurately

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<sup>47</sup> Martin McLoone, 'The Abused Child of History: Neil Jordan's *The Butcher Boy*', *Cineaste*, vol. 23, no. 4, 1998, pp. 32-36: 33.

<sup>48</sup> Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 49.

portray the irony of Francie's questionable narration in the novel. The friction generated between what is shown and what is heard becomes a necessary means of reproducing unreliable narration in a medium which, because of its method of photographic reproduction, is traditionally thought of as allied with realism. This seemingly 'truthful' representation when paired with the uncertainty of the origins of the voice-over creates tension between word and image and leads the spectator to question the narrative's reliability.

In addition to developing our sense of the narration as possibly unreliable, the voice-over performs several other functions. Firstly, it provides a tone akin to a comic book/Western genre which develops out of Francie Brady's fantasy world, his reading of comic books and viewing of films and television programmes - most of which are Westerns or Science Fiction films.<sup>50</sup> Stemming from McCabe's own interest in comic books and films which began in his childhood and, most likely, Jordan's ongoing fascination with Westerns,<sup>51</sup> the references to popular culture generate a context within which the violence occurs and becomes reflective of the effects they have on our perceptions of reality. The aesthetic of the adult voice-over replicates the effect of captions in comic books, or the narrator of other media who interjects frequently, keeping up a running commentary on events. Adding to the excitement, the Philip Marlowe brand of commentary is often expressed with phrases such as 'Meanwhile our brave hero...' and acts as a sort of sports commentator praising the actions of the protagonist and reinforcing their spectacular nature. However,

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<sup>49</sup> Fidelma Farley, in her article 'Interrogating Myths of Maternity', describes the casting of O'Connor in the role as a 're-working, partly ironic, of the sacred maternal icon' (p. 219).

<sup>50</sup> Luke Gibbons, in *Transformations in Irish Culture*, examines the myth of the West in Irish and American Culture in great detail, primarily through Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. Although he draws comparison between the Irish and American myths in their 'hostility to law and order', the American, Gibbons explains, is characterised by a desire for individualism, whereas the Irish myth conversely is 'an escape from individualism and the fragmentation of community which Synge believed to be endemic in the modernizing process.' (p. 24).

<sup>51</sup> Colin Lacey, 'Patrick McCabe: A Comedy of Horrors' *Publisher's Weekly*, 16 November 1998, vol. 245, no. 46, pp. 50-51; Neil Jordan, 'Neil Jordan's Guilty Pleasures' *Film Comment*, vol. 28, no. 6, Nov-Dec 1992, pp. 36-39. Jordan shares a fondness for John Ford's Westerns, but is quick to point out his dislike for the 'bits of Irishery he'd shove into them.'

the effect of this particular use of the voice-over in *The Butcher Boy* when placed alongside a visual narrative which, for the majority of the film, realistically depicts the bleak environment and activities of an emotionally traumatised boy, the result is both comic and tragic.

The voice-over also functions as a glimpse into the inner fantasy world of Francie Brady. The discordance between Francie's equally valid realities is great and positions the spectator to anticipate the damage Francie's interpretation of reality may cause. Perhaps the voice-over appears most indicative of its psychologically representative nature - as literally, the voices in his head - when the narrative pauses for the voice-over and Francie to converse. Breaking a convention as strong as characters never looking into the camera, Francie interacts with something usually employed as a narrative device. The result proves the break in convention necessary, by drawing attention to the narrative's constructed form and informing the spectator that it is not only existing as its conventional use would imply - a guide for their own benefit - but exists for the main character, and maybe even because of the main character. These moments reinforce our identifications with Francie, because we are privy to information not available to the community surrounding him. As already mentioned, the narrator, seen as our link to the filmmaker, crosses over the self-conscious boundary of the storytelling, and moves into direct interaction with the narrative. No longer invisible to the central character, the narrator fulfils a common urge in the spectator - a desire to communicate with the characters in order to prevent specific events from occurring, or to help them in their struggle. Kozloff explains this as going to see a film and 'someone from the audience has shouted "Don't go in there!" or "There's the shark!" at the screen, and often we want to shout ourselves'.<sup>52</sup> Making this a reality, by allowing the narrator direct access to the main character, we become allied with the main character even further. It tugs at the liminal edges of the narrative, renegotiating the boundaries between the spectators and the narrative world of the film.

Such instances additionally call attention to the relationship between the voice-over and Francie. If it is an adult Francie, it must be one nostalgically reflecting back, renegotiating the events of his childhood self. In some regards, *The Butcher Boy* is vaguely reminiscent of the American television programme *The Wonder Years*, which recalled the experiences of a boy growing up in the 1960s through the nostalgic voice-over of a grown man, continually reassessing the motives and actions of his childhood. However, the narrative voice in *The Butcher Boy* is also derivative of Francie's fantasy world and can never be entirely trusted. The process of reconstructing childhood poses additional problems which call into question the narrative's own reliability. Alternatively, if the voice-over is merely the voices in his head, or a combination of an adult's memories of a childhood alter-ego, still the dividing line between reality and fantasy becomes tenuous. However, the problematic effect of the voice-over is crucial to the structure. In *The Butcher Boy*, the narrative reveals Francie's tendency to filter reality through strands of his own fantasy world. Sometimes entire sequences of surreal digression are played out with a set of characters who only turn up in reality later in the narrative.

For instance, when Francie breaks into the Nugents' house, he constructs an imaginary narrative in which he teaches Philip and Mrs Nugent to behave as pigs. The fantasy continues until Mrs Nugent breaks the spell when she returns home to discover Francie defecating on the floor. More briefly, the novel details Francie's interaction with other people, mingling and confusing which is the real event and which Francie's own invention. At times the fictitious nature of his insights are made obvious. This generally occurs at certain gaps in the text, when Francie's tightly woven adventure narrative loosens, accidentally allowing for a glimpse of reality to show through. For example, when Francie spies on Philip in bed with his mother he fancies that 'If there was a word bubble coming out of his mouth I knew what would be written in it. I love my mother more than anything in the world and I'd never do anything in the world to hurt her' (p. 44). The cartoon quality

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<sup>52</sup> Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers*, p. 95.

of Francie's observation clearly relates to his constructed fantasy world, but in other episodes, the distinctions serve as an ongoing commentary running alongside reality.

When Francie debates the genuineness of Mrs Nugent when he bumps into her on the street, the divisions between his mental world and reality begin to blur. Francie admits the contradictions in his own environment as he 'was thinking how right ma was -- Mrs Nugent all smiles when she met us and how are you getting on Mrs and young Francis are you both well? It was hard to believe that all the time what she was really saying was: *Ah hello Mrs Pig how are you and look Philip do you see what's coming now -- The Pig Family!*' (p. 5).

That Francie is identifying with his Mother's interpretation of events is significant, primarily because it is his Mother's own mental health problems that initiate the conflict, but also because his idealisation of his mother intensifies after her death, and with it the corresponding guilt for having run away when it occurred. Further into the novel, the uncertainty of Francie's narration makes it increasingly difficult to locate reality.

After Francie invents a tax for any Nugent passing in front of his house, he is certain he sees Mrs Nugent, pointing him out to Philip: 'I was a good bit away from them but I saw her stopping to point me out to Philip. I saw her. *There he is!* she said, *there won't be so much chat out of him from now on Philip, him and his pig toll tax!*' (p. 51). Although Mrs Nugent maintains she never said this, Francie is convinced of it, and attempts to convince us. Even the stylistic device of italics will not serve to distinguish the narrative's real and fictive boundaries. McCabe employs the use of italics for various effects. Not surprisingly, in a similar fashion to that of the film's voice-over, the use of italics and general expression of reality's ambivalence in the novel ultimately validate both versions of reality, strengthening our identification with Francie.

No different from the effect of the voice-over in the film, and similar to what Lury refers to as functioning as both remote and immediate, the novel distances us rarely from Francie, but from the people and events surrounding him as he attempts to synthesise the

indigestible material around him into a more easily confronted and manageable fantasy world. Yet the fantasy world is not entirely his and may be symptomatic of the culture's tendency to recycle harsh realities of the past through soft nostalgic lenses. The opening of the film suggests an imposed fantasy world outside of Francie, opening with a montage sequence of comics depicting various super-heroes, cowboys, and battle scenes, set to a lounge version of 'Mac-the-Knife'. The final comic frame, of what appears to be a wounded soldier entirely bandaged from head to toe, fades into a matching photographic image and our focus is slowly sharpened into accepting that it is not a soldier, but Francie, a young boy. At this point we are also introduced to the narrator. The placement of the disturbing narrative of Francie Brady within this context reflects on the culture's own relationship with events surrounding them, and the process by which they gain significance as real or fictitious events.

The novel begins with Francie hiding in a wooded area, after he has killed Mrs Nugent. This alternate beginning presenting Francie as almost a wounded soldier, but anticipating Francie's scorched state after setting his house on fire, seems more closely associated with the social implications hinted at by Neil Jordan's film. Other additions to the film, attributed to Jordan by certain reviewers, are the inclusion of images of the cold war, although this is something the novel clearly deals with through various references, including several to Krushchev. Certainly the script evolved through the co-authorship of both Jordan and McCabe. McCabe went through several stages in the initial writing of the script. His first attempt he was asked to shorten, his second produced what Jordan saw as a new novel, and the third - the final shooting script - was edited together from the first two, by Jordan.<sup>53</sup> Much of the novel, thematically and stylistically, remains. Although the additions are not necessarily attributed to Jordan, it is a likely assumption that an issue of such thematic prominence as the images of the cold war were given added significance through Jordan's structuring of the film's narrative. Throughout the film, and shortly after

the opening, images of atomic bombs are prominent. Set in the 1960s, the fear of nuclear fallout and references to Krushchev and communism form a predominant theme of the narrative, and as Francie cries out to the screen in a movie theatre, 'come on youse alien bastards one bomb is all it takes', the fantasy of disaster and his passionate response emulates the warning cries against communism of those in his predominantly Catholic community. Although overlapping in this way, Francie's world still serves as a form of escape. When he has broken into the Nugents' house, a public service announcement regarding the event of a nuclear fallout is being broadcast on television. After tiring of it, Francie yells out 'enough about bombs', then proceeds to converse with the voice-over. The numerous images of nuclear war, religion, and popular culture, reflects a particular moment in history, but also refers to a collective fantasy world to which the film's opening sequence points, a hyper-reality that results in the town failing to notice Francie going to murder Mrs Nugent because they are busy preparing for the Virgin Mary to appear that day in the town square.

From the opening of the film, Francie is enclosed in a fictional world, literally trapped in the lines of a cartoon. The position from which the spectator initially locates Francie within the narrative, coupled with the use of the adult voice as narration, suggests it is not Francie who is guilty. He is positioned in this way, suppressed by the desires of others. Throughout the narrative he battles for control and validity. We are immediately aware of the unreliability of Francie's subjectivity, in both the novel and the film, and the duration of the narrative involves a progression to either accepting it or at least discovering it to be no less important than any other narrational point-of-view.

Martin McLoone suggests that Francie Brady's monologue may perhaps represent a voice of rural Ireland. After making brief reference to Gayatri Spivak's notion that 'There is no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can speak', he describes how Luke Gibbons

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<sup>53</sup> FitzSimon, 'St Macartan, Minnie the Minx and Mondo Movies', pp. 176-177.

and other critics have argued 'that the missing discourse in Irish culture is, in fact, the voice of rural Ireland, spoken for and traduced in the past by the nationalist (and urban) bourgeoisie, and in contemporary Ireland by the new liberal (again urban) revisionist consensus'.<sup>54</sup> Although insightful and rather hopeful, the suggestion that it is Francie's voice being spoken holds loosely, and becomes even more loosely held in the film. The articulation, generated from the fantasy space Francie has created outwith the community, is still channelled through discourse - popular culture. Within the frame of the film, Francie Brady is occasionally unable to articulate his feelings. In the form of the voice-over - the disembodied adult voice speaking through the words and devices of various media - his voice reaches its fullest articulation. Only, we must remind ourselves, it is not the Francie we see on screen, but an adult voice imposed onto a child's. Linking up thematically with other attempts for Francie to work through various discourses to establish his own identity, the story ultimately reflects on a struggling conflict of class relations that plays itself out in the form of Francie's misogyny and leads to the butchering of his peer's mother. It speaks to the not altogether obvious, but still powerfully tied relations between gender, class, and social being.

***From the outside looking in: the boy at the window***

In an interview with Richard Kerridge, McCabe describes Francie as suffering from a 'malignant shame' involving the shame of:

what he's done to his mother, of his father's drunkenness, of the state in which his house is left and so on. Subconsciously he is deeply aware of his class and his position in that. So the Nugents, who are a perfectly ordinary middle-class family, become the focus of his hatred, and of the longing for release, for revenge for this malignant shame with which he is saddled. So in that sense, there's an aspect of the class thing.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> McLoone, 'The Abused Child of History', p. 36. Quoting Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Cary Nelson and Laurence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271-313.

<sup>55</sup> Richard Kerridge, 'Meat is Murder: Patrick McCabe talks to Richard Kerridge' *Irish Studies Review*, no. 3, Spring 1993, pp. 10-12: 10.



It seems symbolic that Mrs Nugent moves to the village from England, and Francie claims everything was great until she arrived. In the film, when Francie peers into the Nugents' window, either to watch their television or witness the domestic interaction between Philip and his mother, it is visually poignant. He is shown frequently throughout the film on the outside looking in (e.g. looking into the Nugent's house, or looking into the café). The occurrences in which he is 'inside' looking out, rather than illustrating his inclusiveness in society, serve to highlight his entrapment. This trope is further played out in a scene visualising him sitting leisurely in a chair in the Priest's room in the industrial school, daydreaming as he looks out of the window. Towards the end of the narrative, in the film, when Francie's options and allies have dwindled to extinction, he uses a window as a slate upon which to note loved ones he has lost. Tracing his finger across the condensation on the window, he writes a list of names.

This addition to the film's narrative works effectively to externalise the internal emotions of Francie. Windows characteristically function as a melodramatic device in film. Emphasizing the dynamics of the space cordoned off between public and domestic thresholds, and often generating psychoanalytic readings, they are also evocative of a certain degree of nostalgia.<sup>56</sup> Their visual impact is not exclusive to the cinema, but is often employed in several forms, including literary description. For instance, in the opening pages of *The Great Gatsby* the narrator exposes the realities of privilege and position by likening the experience of life to the act of looking from a window.<sup>57</sup> The metaphor in Fitzgerald's novel, like many novels, serves the same function as in film, but rather than distinguish public space from domestic, it serves to further emphasise the demarcations of class. In *The Butcher Boy* windows further isolate Francie from the rest of society and more specifically the middle-class. Francie looks through windows, observing

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<sup>56</sup> For an interesting analysis of the function of the window in the narrative space of the literary adaptation see Julianne Pidduck, 'Of Windows and Country Walks: Frames of Space and Movement in 1990s Austen Adaptations', *Screen*, vol. 39 no. 4, 1998, pp. 381-400.

<sup>57</sup> F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (London and New York: Penguin, 1990), p. 10.

from the outside, and institutions such as the school or the mental hospital are referred to as the house of a hundred windows. In an almost Freudian narrative structure, Francie feels guilty because he believes he is a bad son to his mother which leads to her suicide. He is always shown to be closely observing the Nugent household. He watches from the window imagining scenarios of stomach-wrenching domestic bliss, involving an all too attentive and doting mother, and, always looming in the background, an all too agreeable father.

In Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark*, windows act as a central metaphor for the experience of a child growing up in Northern Ireland. From the outset, windows take on supernatural characteristics as the novel opens with the young boy being told by his mother not to cross the path of a window 'where the cathedral and the sky always hung',<sup>58</sup> while going up the set of stairs. Later we learn of a priest's attempt to exorcise a spirit that 'trapped it in the glass of the landing window' (p.10). Windows in the novel exhibit an uncanny degree of control over their beholders. When a story of a haunted house is revealed to us, we are told how a man in the navy, long away from home, returns to find his wife and children living with another man, and turned away by his wife he moves into the house next door 'that belonged to a widow, and sat day after day, at the window, looking at his own house, his own children, across the way' (p. 163). Everything becomes inconsequential as the window takes possession, metaphorically representing the man's obsessional focus and his physical separation from his family and inability to reassimilate himself into his former life. Ending with the same image as it began, the narrator explains, 'That evening we would take my father to the cathedral that hung in the stair window and she [his mother] would climb to her bedroom in silence, pausing at the turn of the stairs to stare out at the spire under which, for that night, before the darkened altar, he so innocently lay' (p. 233). What is most remarkable in this final line, and is echoed in the opening

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<sup>58</sup> Seamus Deane, *Reading in the Dark* (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 5. All further references to *Reading in the Dark* refer to this edition.

passage, is the boy's perception of the cathedral as something hanging in the window, a static object, like a picture hanging on the wall. But it - the cathedral in the window - is always there.

As in *The Butcher Boy*, the narrator's act of recounting a childhood experience is reflected in this narrative image. The relationship of the narrative to character and, ultimately the narrator, resembles a series of Chinese boxes (i.e. the young boy's observations of the community around him form one part of the story, while the narrator's more distanced look at the reality childhood forms another). The spirit trapped in the window becomes what is no longer accessible, or physically was always unavailable. In this regard, the window serves as a trope in which the past is metaphorically trapped. Additionally, this symbolic use of windows evokes the experiences of a child observing an adult world, but also seems reflective of class issues. Specifically, it is social exclusion dramatised. Just as the voice-over represents Francie's positioning in society as a voice outside the immediate narrative, so the window denotes an isolation from what lies outside the narrative frame. Only diegetic sound is embedded in the image, a voice-over is somewhere outside.<sup>59</sup>

### ***Francie's power of vision***

Throughout the film, Francie skilfully adopts alternative roles to manipulate those around him. In the industrial school, he gains the favour of the other children by telling jokes and impresses them with his wide knowledge of popular culture. But when he decides he must earn his 'Francie not-a-bad-bastard-anymore' award to leave the school and re-establish his friendship with Joe, threatened by Joe's relationship with Philip, Francie knowingly adjusts his behaviour in order to gain the approval of the priests. This initially involves volunteering to be an altar boy. Pushing the limits, he tells the priests of visions that have presented themselves to him in the fields. One particular priest preaches in a sermon that the 'soul of a child is the purest of all', accordingly Francie's visions are to be interpreted as

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<sup>59</sup> Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, p. 3.

truth. Adding to the complexities, the film shows us these visions, making it unclear whether or not they are fabrication. But the visions carve out a place for the affection of the priests, particularly Father Sullivan, who lustfully listens to Francie's descriptions of the visions, and often asks for them to be repeated. From this point in the narrative Francie gains a significant position of power.

When Father Sullivan, or 'Father Tiddly' as Francie continually refers to him, begins to make advances, Francie finds humour in it, and even though he isn't entirely clear about what is going on, he prides himself on his ability to sustain his seat of power. In the novel, he details speaking with the priest and how he lowered his 'eyelids shyly like Our Lady did' (p. 79). Father Sullivan refers to him as his 'best little girl' (p. 80), and later discusses a fantasy with Francie about getting married. Francie recalls:

Tiddly said wouldn't it be lovely if we could get married. I said it would be great. I could buy you flowers and chocolates and you could have dinner ready when I come home he says. Ha ha I laughed, like a girl, and did Tiddly like that! Little Miss Snowdrop, I said, Queen of All The Beautiful Things in the World! , and that nearly drove him astray in the head altogether. The sweat hopped off him. Flip, in went the Rolos. (p. 86-87)

Within their relations, Francie adopts a female role, dominated by the Father. But the relationship involves a complicit negotiation which, through a necessity for secrecy, lends a large degree of control to Francie. Francie knows he can get whatever he wants as long as the role-playing is sustained – and with it the Rolos.

Likewise, his visions secure a similar position in the community at large. In the film, this position of power is detailed through figural positioning and the general composition of the frame. A series of episodes set within various administrative offices around the school depict his newfound methods of empowerment. These scenes, which often show Francie leisurely seated in a chair as other characters vie for his attention, suggest what is so clearly resonant in the novel. In one particular scene, after his first vision, Francie's narration describes the experience to Father Sullivan. Francie remains seated, staring

upwards while Father Sullivan hovers over him, hanging on his every word. The voice-over continues throughout the scene, speaking as an older Francie in the past tense, suffusing the events with an ironic edge. When the Priest masturbates, causing him to fall off the chair, Francie stands to help him up. The extreme low angle shot, framing Francie as he looms over the Father, emphasises his position of authority. In a scene shortly following this episode, Francie's father, Benny, visits him. They meet in a private room. Contrasting with the scene's exceptionally dark lighting, Francie, reclining in a chair in front of the window, is framed by natural light. As his father paces around him, fondly recalling a rather sentimentalised version of his romantic past with his wife, Francie stares blankly out the window in front of him. His obstinate posture is accentuated by the direct angle of the camera framing his profile. His adult voice-over comically begins the scene by fancifully mimicking the discussion that might have occurred between his father Benny and the priest about a bottle of whisky his father has smuggled in. The voice-over then disappears until the end of this serious scene in which Francie tells his father he doesn't have a son, replacing the light-hearted, comic voice-over with a solemn one. But like the other scene Francie is positioned statically as the others are forced to manoeuvre around him.

No longer must Francie prove his worth, and those around him must now vie for his attention. Francie's visions privilege his status in the institution, but more importantly, the end of the film involves Francie asserting himself, even though he enjoys the fanciful nature of cartoons and the escapism of genre - Science Fiction and Westerns - he proves his ability to distinguish between fact and fiction by telling his father he knows the reality beneath the fairytales he tells about his relations with his mother. Additionally, what transpires between him and Father Sullivan will finally earn him the equivalent of the 'Francie-not-a-bad-bastard-anymore' award: his release. The surreal quality and archetypal portrayal of the priests, Mrs Nugent, and others in authority, ensures our own empathy with Francie.

Additionally, the visual representation of Francie dressing up in a bonnet for Father Sullivan emphasises the ironic subtext of Francie's position of power and control. In the novel, this is clearly narrated to us through Francie's humorous portrayal of the incident. Almost feeling sympathy for him, Francie's reaction is that he 'felt like laughing my arse off but poor old Tiddly wouldn't have liked that biting away at the skin of his mouth oh Francis' (p. 90). He continues his story, explaining how he could tell the priest lies in exchange for Rolos. Francie's feeling that he is getting away with something, pulling the wool over the priest's eyes, extends to the film version in its contextual positioning within other sequences portraying Francie's manipulation of power. Oddly, the similar effect of the voice-over is not employed throughout the duration of this scene. Perhaps because these significant moments, and the father's reference to his mother, are still too painful to reflect on (i.e. the voice-over's presence is often initiated by Francie's exuberance or his angst-ridden quest for revenge).

Regardless, the scene creates a similar effect to that of the novel in its disturbing combination of joyful and horrific atmospheres. Immediately following the solemn encounter Francie has with his father, the more-brightly lit scene begins with a smiling Francie dressed-up in a large yellow bonnet. Once again reclined in a chair in the priest's office, Father Sullivan hands him a sweet and says 'If you can't have a bit of a laugh what can you have?' The priest then kneels down to the reclining Francie, in an effort to speak with him. The atmosphere is light, until the priest mentions his mother and asks, if she ever wore a bonnet, at which point Francie appears considerably uncomfortable. The mood turns hostile when Father Sullivan suggests Francie confide in him, and tell him the worst thing he's ever done, something he didn't even tell his mother. Francie then attacks him before the other priests intervene. When their relations are uncovered, Francie, still seated in the office, swivelling in the chair, sneakily devours custard creams, while simultaneously requesting more. He smiles as he knows he is in a position to bargain. We briefly hear the beginning of the extradiegetic music, and the mood lightens as the Father

promises him a surprise at the end of the week if he keeps up his good behaviour. At this point the ironic voice-over opens optimistically and then the music begins again.

Commenting on the Father's promise, the voice-over reflects:

Poor old Bubbles what he was really trying to say was Francie you can have the Francie-not-a-bad-bastard-anymore diploma as long as you can get out of here and keep your mouth shut. You're like a fungus growing on the walls and we want them washed clean. Isn't that right Father Bubbles? It is indeed.

While the use of voice-over in this scene is typical of the film, it is lengthy compared to the use of voice-over in other films. However, its length generates a breathless flow that conveys the relief Francie experiences at his escape. He learns the constraints of the adult world and the way in which they may be used to his advantage. The music carrying over to the next scene also functions in this way and is picked up by the voice-over once again as Francie runs through the village. 'Off I went riding down the fresh country road. Yep it sure was good to be up town. Yee Haw!' Ultimately, the good behaviour is explained as keeping quiet about the incident and the 'surprise' is Francie being sent home. This use of the voice-over, not altogether dissimilar from the playful use of words Joyce displays (as observed in the earlier analysis of the 'Circe' passage in *Ulysses*), further reflects the novel's own madcap style.

Ironically, the older Francie (and accordingly, Francie's voice-over) is played by Stephen Rea, who also plays Francie's father in the film. At times, this interchange of characters can create a degree of confusion; particularly in scenes involving the father, which include the voice-over. But the overlapping of character plays an important part in the narrative as well as Francie's feeling of identification with his father that is evident in the novel. At the end of McCabe's novel, Francie describes his increasing similarity to his father: 'So now I have a trumpet and if you could see me I look just like da going round the place in my Al Capone coat' (p. 214). The film's literal transposition of the older Francie in the institution

realises this quality of the novel, reflecting his almost childlike identification with a stoic and distant father.

The vision he has at end of film suggests he is still suffering from delusions. However, the voice-over, executed by Stephen Rea, is finally matched to Francie's adult self. It is at this moment that we connect the voice-over's interpretations of Francie's experience. The voice's take on certain events, including those of a more fanciful nature, suggests they are reflective of Francie as a child, but more significantly, Francie as an adult. This connection subtly questions the success of Francie's recovery in the institution.

Nevertheless, the ending restores our faith in the reliability of Francie's narration when the Virgin Mary appears to him and hands him a snowdrop which crosses over from his fantasy to 'real' story narration.<sup>60</sup> This technique is similar to the final scene in *Breaking the Waves* (Lars von Trier, 1996). As Duncan Petrie explained, when the bells ring out over the sea after the lead character's death, any identification with the villagers' assumption that she is mentally ill is nullified because we hear the bells just as she did, dispelling the possibility that they were imagined.<sup>61</sup>

As Charlotte O'Sullivan has suggested, the ending of *The Butcher Boy* blurs the boundary between fantasy and reality, when compared to the ending of McCabe's novel which closes with Francie in tears: 'McCabe's story is a tragedy with many victims – a study of a world in which terrible things happen, deserved or not. In Jordan's version, the world deserves everything it gets.'<sup>62</sup> Perhaps this is what ultimately leaves O'Sullivan to declare Jordan's film to be a celebration of Francie's violent outrage; but whether or not Francie is brought to tears in the end, it is apparent that society is to blame. In the film's ending, Francie sighs 'Oh fuck, oh mother of Jesus', when the Virgin Mary appears to him in this final sequence,

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<sup>60</sup> This act also ironically fulfils Francie's role-playing for the priest as 'Little Miss Snowdrop – Queen of All The Beautiful Things in the World!'

<sup>61</sup> Petrie, *Screening Scotland*, p. 208.

<sup>62</sup> O'Sullivan, 'Massacre of the Innocents', p. 12



surprised because the visions remained absent for quite some time. When he remarks that he has not seen her for a while she replies 'It's not that I haven't been thinking about you', implying that regardless of Francie's state, she is always somehow present. Additionally, by mingling Francie's visions associated with his illness with religious iconography, the differences of the experience of alternative realities in religion and mental illness is called into question. The contrast between the village's borderline hysteria underscored by a belief that the Virgin Mary will make an appearance in the town square, running alongside Francie's own experience, has the effect of normalising his own delusions.

Likewise, the grotesque visual representation of the abattoir and the strength the butcher implies is necessary to execute the pigs, underscores a darker side to societal contradictions. In Richard Kerridge's interview, McCabe recalls growing up in Clones and going past the abattoir on his way to school: 'You'd be passing the slaughterhouse. It was a beautiful sunny day. There was music playing through an open window. And there was this "bang!" now and then, as you were going home to your lunch. It's a lingering image.'<sup>63</sup> The boundaries of murder, a society's unquestioned slaughtering of pigs contrasted with Francie's own murder of Mrs Nugent, similarly questions the boundaries of cultural acceptance in the way that the visions of Francie are a question-mark against the village's hope for the appearance of the Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mary, like Queen Victoria for whom the fountain in the town square was constructed, never appears for the village. For Francie, she appears frequently, and the actual camera's testimony to these visions, as well her gift of a snowdrop for Francie in the end, invites the audience to live in Francie's reality. Visions come to those who suffer most.

Richard Kerridge remarks that 'Francie punishes the world by taking seriously the images it gives him: TV images, religious images, things people say to him.'<sup>64</sup> In this sense,

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<sup>63</sup> Kerridge, 'Meat is Murder', p. 10.

<sup>64</sup>Kerridge, 'Meat is Murder', p. 11.

Francie has - contrary to his own belief - not pulled the wool over everyone's eyes in his attempt to earn the 'Francie-not-a-bad-bastard-anymore' award. The priests' praise rings true, and his strong belief in everything he is presented with lends him a degree of innocence which should, in reality, mark him out as martyr in a religious or even more general cultural context. Catholicism, Christianity, or even religion in general - has a large investment in the miracle; transubstantiation assumes that every Sunday wine and bread are transformed to Christ's body and blood through the power of a belief. Francie ultimately displays an immense source of belief. It is an almost wholly literal belief, not altogether dissimilar to Roddy Doyle's Paddy Clarke who decides to model himself on his favourite story about Father Damien, a missionary priest who goes to a leper colony, dies and is sainted. After experimenting with an assortment of recipes for making hosts, and trying to find lepers in Ireland, he becomes disappointed because his little brother Sinbad can only pretend to be a real leper, and he doesn't receive the delighted reaction from his parents that he expects when he tells them (pp. 46-53). Paddy believes in the miracle of religion. Like Francie Brady he wholeheartedly wants to accept that everything is literal. It becomes an integral part of the fabric of childhood, alongside interests in comic books and popular cultural narratives. In the community Francie inhabits, a literal belief system reverberates with negative connotations. It is the consequence and effect of this belief, and its complex intermingling with politics and popular culture, that is culturally unacceptable and results in an intricate commentary on the nature of a society's beliefs and their boundaries, particularly in their assimilation into a popular cultural context.

### 3. Roddy Doyle: *The Barrytown Trilogy*

The dark elements of fantasy embodying the world of Roddy Doyle's *Paddy Clarke* share more with the subject of the previous chapter's discussion, Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*, than Doyle's earlier, more optimistic celebrations of working-class culture from *The Barrytown Trilogy*.<sup>1</sup> Doyle has had much experience with working in other media. All three of his novels from the *The Barrytown Trilogy* were adapted to film: for *The Commitments* (Alan Parker, 1991) he co-wrote the screen adaptation, and *The Snapper* (Stephen Frears, 1993) and *The Van* (Stephen Frears, 1996) he adapted himself. Doyle also scripted *The Family* (Michael Winterbottom, 1994) a drama for television, and co-produced his original screenplay, *When Brendan Met Trudy* (Kieron Walsh, 2000).

It is no surprise that Doyle's own writing has proven to be readily adaptable. Doyle himself cites the cinema as one of his first inspirations for writing fiction and has said that if made to choose between 'watching a fictional film – a feature film – and documentary ... nine times out of ten I'd go for the feature film'.<sup>2</sup> Here Doyle implies it is just as reasonable to have been inspired by film, as by a particular novel or style of writing. This influence is strikingly evident in his writing. Borrowing techniques from the medium of film, in addition to other fictional writing, Doyle's style is most strongly characterised by its inventive and evocative dialogue, depicting working-class Dublin.<sup>3</sup> This characteristic facilitates the work's adaptation to film, and likewise, the global success of his films. However, the same dialogue that aptly ensures the ease with which it is adapted to film is often lightly criticised for posing certain difficulties in other markets, particularly the

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<sup>1</sup> Roddy Doyle, *The Barrytown Trilogy* (London: Vintage, 1998). All further references to *The Commitments*, *The Van*, and *The Snapper* will be to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Steve Redhead, 'New Island: Roddy Doyle' in *Repetitive Beat Generation* (Edinburgh: Rebel Inc, 2000), pp. 32-46: 34.

American. Just as the North American publication of Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* called for a glossary, one reviewer explained that because of the 'local vulgarisms' in *The Commitments* a glossary was distributed alongside its promotional materials.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the subtitling of various sequences of *Trainspotting*, several films are now entirely subtitled for their release abroad. Most recently, Ken Loach's *Sweet Sixteen* (2002), set in Greenock on the west coast of Scotland, premiered at Cannes with subtitles, and has provided them for the first fifteen minutes of the film for its screenings in England, so that ears untrained to West-coast Scots might ease their way into the film. Even though *The Commitments* proved successful, one reviewer predicted 'the film's uncompromising language and strong regional accents may prove a stumbling block on its US release'.<sup>5</sup>

*The Barrytown Trilogy* follows the lives of the Rabbittes<sup>6</sup>, a working-class family in Dublin, and although several of the names alter and certain characters are lost and picked up again from film to film, novel to novel, the primary characters, particularly the father, whom the narratives focus significantly on, remain. Each novel centres on developments in the lives of particular family members, and tends to spotlight a key event in the life of one character. *The Commitments* examines the son's interest in managing a band. *The Snapper* deals with the daughter's unplanned pregnancy, and also the father's own surprised excitement and involvement in the process. Finally, *The Van* focuses its attention on the father and his friend's initiative to start up a chip-van. Even though it is possible for each novel to stand independently from the others in the trilogy, particularly after the success of *The Commitments*, in an attempt to avoid the risk of being stereotyped, Doyle was keen to avoid repeating the formula. It seems difficult to imagine any similarity *The Snapper*

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<sup>3</sup> Again, Doyle's writing seems to be moving away from his earlier style. In addition to *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*, his *A Star Called Henry*, paints a much darker portrait of working-class Dublin. Moreover, his most recent writing is significantly less driven by dialogue.

<sup>4</sup> Amy Dawes, 'The Commitments', *Variety*, 12 August 1991, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> Patricia Dobson, 'The Commitments', *Screen International*, 16 August 1991, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> The names vary in their corresponding films.

could possibly have with *The Commitments*. With almost no musical references at all, Doyle utilises the dramatic nature of the storyline to express many parts of the narrative through dialogue. The producer, Lynda Myles, has explained how she and Doyle both 'thought it important to make *The Snapper* completely distinctive'. She suggests that because it is on a smaller scale it is 'very intimate' and that Doyle's wit and humour 'is more noticeable in *The Snapper* because in *The Commitments* hardly anyone ever gets to finish a sentence'.<sup>7</sup>

*The Van* also takes a turn away from the first two films, including an understated soundtrack by Eric Clapton. Its narrative develops in a similar way to *The Commitments*, following the development of the chip van and then its ultimate destruction by the characters who most desired its existence in the first place. Adopting a more intimate approach, the film chooses a closer examination of fewer characters and a narrative which stresses the character-driven elements of the narrative, rather than a narrative which sets its pace with the sheer exuberance generated from a large cast of characters. If, as Lynda Myles claims, the characters of *The Commitments* are not allowed to finish a sentence, by the time the handful of characters focused on throughout the trilogy reaches the close of *The Van*, they have been given ample opportunity for expression.

Undoubtedly different stylistically, the novellas, and their transformation to film, still have many features in common. All films effectively deal with the relationship of popular culture to Ireland (some more subtly than others) and grapple with issues of identity, class, and gender. More interesting, in terms of this study, all of the adaptations must interpret the original text, which in each case consists largely of dialogue, readily adaptable to film, but lacking in the sort of descriptive exposition which often provides the adaptor with a formative blueprint for the mise-en-scène.

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<sup>7</sup> Lynda Myles, 'Making *The Snapper*', *Snapper Pressbook* (BFI: Special Collections). *The Snapper* was filmed for the BBC, whereas *The Commitments*, was partly produced by the US company 'Dirty

### *The Commitments*

Roddy Doyle, commenting on the irrelevance of whether or not a filmmaker was born in Ireland, said: 'Some of the best Irish films of the last ten years, and a lot of the worst, have been made by people who don't happen to be Irish. And some of the best Irish films, and a lot of the worst, have been made by people who do happen to be Irish.'<sup>8</sup> Perhaps in defence of *The Commitments* director – the British-born and BBC-groomed Alan Parker – Doyle plays down the significance of a filmmaker's national origins. As we have discussed in relation to *Cal's* director Pat O'Connor, even an Irish-born director may adopt a perspective that is outside Ireland. Parker in particular, whose films include *Bugsy Malone* (1976), *Fame* (1980), *Pink Floyd - The Wall* (1982), *Midnight Express* (1978), *Angel Heart* (1987), *Mississippi Burning* (1988), and *Evita* (1996) has gone on to film additional literary adaptations depicting Ireland with *Angela's Ashes* (1999), and may be seen as presenting a Hollywood representation of Irishness, rather than a British, or indeed, an Irish one.

In Alan Parker's film version of *The Commitments*, music plays an integral part in the narrative, and becomes a focal point in the central characters' process of reconstructing their Irish identity. Conceived by Jimmy Rabbitte in the novel and 'Joey the Lips Fagan' in the film, The Commitments are the self-professed 'saviours of soul'. In one of the film's earlier scenes – one of the most well known and critically discussed sequences from the film – Jimmy Rabbitte has arranged for members of the band to view a tape of James Brown in a video rental shop. After watching it, Dean, one of the band's members, asks if they are a little too white. Rabbitte swiftly proffers his defence: 'Don't you get it lads, the Irish are the blacks of Europe, Dubliners the blacks of Ireland, Northsiders are the blacks of Dublin. So say it once, say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud.' In the representation of this particular moment, the film replaces the novel's word 'niggers' with 'blacks', perhaps revealing the film industry's beleaguered relationship with censorship and the restrictions

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Hands Productions' (*Angela's Ashes*, *Evita* (1996)) and 'Beacon' (who would go on to produce *The Van*).

of certain genres. If Samuel L. Jackson and John Travolta get away with the word in *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) it is because it is understood as a subversive reappropriation. In *The Commitments*, even if its use were similarly intended, it could be misconstrued. Nevertheless, Jimmy Rabbitte, in both novel and film, resists traditional representations of Ireland in favour of identification with Black-American soul music.

Scottish writers have also expressed a similar connection with Black-American culture.

For example, Janice Galloway recalls her first encounter with Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, which forced her to see

parallels with the Scottish female situation in it. The comparison might well be hugely insulting to a black woman, but from a selfish perspective, that is from the perspective of me making sense of where I was at from it, I could hear chimes. The chime that my language didn't make sense, was uneducated or stupid. The way I signalled not through my skin but through my mouth that I was not capable of True Understanding of Culture.<sup>9</sup>

Like Jimmy's empowering speech to the band in *The Commitments*, Galloway voices her own sense of liberation in coming across language empowered in a way she had felt her own language incapable. The band's reliance on Black-American Soul music liberates its members from their perceived fixity of identity.<sup>10</sup>

In the film in particular, references to 'foreign' cultures are visually contrasted with rural images of Dublin. For example, a pub appearing in the novel as The Dark Rosaleen is exchanged for The Miami Vice in order to serve as a further a reference to popular culture and an eye on America in particular. In a scene added in the film version, Jimmy Jr. announces he is auditioning potential band members, and his father launches into his Elvis impersonation. Initially disagreeing with his father on the importance of Elvis, Jimmy

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<sup>8</sup> 'Irish Cinema at the Crossroads', p. 75.

<sup>9</sup> March, 'Interview with Janice Galloway', p. 91.

<sup>10</sup> Timothy D. Taylor argues in 'Living in a Postcolonial World' that the cultural appropriation goes more than one way and that the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s was inspired by the Irish Literary Renaissance, p. 291. George Bornstein also makes this point in 'Afro-Celtic Connections: From

Rabbitte Jr., after their discussion with 'Joey the Lips Fagan' about the time he met Elvis in Graceland, reconsiders, and father and son forge some sort of bond, albeit tentative. The scene begins with a close-up shot of a picture of the Pope mounted on the living room wall. Jimmy Rabbitte Sr.'s voice asks 'so you were actually in Graceland?' before the camera tilts up to reveal a similarly placed portrait of Elvis above, neatly encapsulating the film's consideration of the relations between religion and popular culture. In another humorous sequence, the band members practice on the church organ, belting out a version of 'A Whiter Shade of Pale'.

In the film's opening sequence, we are first introduced to Doyle's Dublin, as Jimmy Rabbitte manoeuvres around a busy marketplace, selling T-shirts amidst the diegetic sound of a man playing a fiddle, surrounded by livestock. A young boy singing a traditional song is next added to the soundtrack. This familiar representation of Ireland, presenting Dublin in an almost rural fashion, is then contrasted with the depiction of the subsequent scenes, when we are initiated to a rather different kind of music. In these contrasting scenes, we are introduced to Imelda, a-soon-to-be-member-of-the-band, at her sister's wedding reception amidst the lounge-style singing of friends and family performing.

The vivid contrast between the music The Commitments play, the band's brazen appropriation and interpretation of Black-American culture, and images of rural Ireland persists throughout the film. It is perhaps most evident when Jimmy Rabbitte Jr. looks for the additional band members, and asks each candidate: 'What are your influences?' The resulting array of various musical stereotypes turning up on his doorstep furthers the band's (as well as the film's) search for a music capable of embodying contemporary Ireland - something to replace the various predecessors no longer representative of a modern metropolis. Dean, the band's saxophone player, causes alarm when he develops an affinity for Jazz. It becomes clear that it is a particular kind of American culture that they are



adopting and Jazz becomes representative of something entirely different: a 'high' culture Jimmy associates with Channel 4 and *The Observer*, not working-class Dublin (p. 123). Jimmy's distinction between the music of the people and the music of the people that has been adopted and circulated as part of the cultural media, and therefore, is now rendered defunct, would prove problematic today when applied to the media-friendly approach of even the most seemingly subversive musical acts.<sup>11</sup>

In many instances, rather than serving to assert their own identity, the band's adoption of another culture's music threatens to overwhelm their own forms of expression. For example, when Jimmy Rabbitte Jr. instructs Imelda immediately after she has begun singing for the first time, he cautions her: 'you don't sing in your own accent'. Here he makes clear that it is not only what you sing, but how you sing it. Within the structure of the band, the local is only allowed access in terms of lyrics, not accent. The only instance in which the native accents are allowed articulation is on the fringes of the band's rehearsal when the girls sing to a baby in Gaelic. For the most part, Soul is wholly adopted by the group of Dublin youth as a means of expressing their own emotions and at least in the novel, the lyrics are altered slightly to reflect life in Dublin. Almost as if by accident, when the band is rehearsing 'What becomes of the broken hearted' Declan alters the ending to 'I'll search for you down on the docks/I'll wait under Clery's clock'. Jimmy's initial response is negative, but after the rest of the band's praise, he lets Deco off with the casual remark: '-yeh should've warned us' (p. 50). After this point, other lyrics are enthusiastically altered to reflect the concerns and conditions of the band's hometown of Dublin.

Jimmy's adamant rejection of accent, when compared to his gradual acceptance of locally reflective lyrics, reveals that the 'performance' of another culture is key - a revelation

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<sup>11</sup> Simon Frith, in 'Music and Identity', makes the point that music's value increases 'the more independent it is of the social forces that organize it'. Jazz's mistake in Jimmy's eyes is not inherent in the music itself but in the social factors attaching themselves to it. In Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (Sage Publications: London, 1996), pp. 108-127.

which proves worrisome. Where Janice Galloway identifies with Toni Morrison in order to come to terms with prejudices against her language as 'uneducated or stupid', the connections would seem futile if they merely resulted in Galloway literally adopting the actual voice of a Black-American woman, by writing in the same register. Just as Harlem Renaissance writers influenced by the Irish literary revival would have been defeating the purpose of linguistic self-empowerment had they tried to copy the Irish English of Synge and O'Casey instead of developing their own Black-American English. Rather than empower *The Commitments*, as Jimmy Rabbitte Jr.'s speech reveals by ending in the proclamation that they *are* Black, the group performs an identity rather than appropriating it as their own. What the distinction between form and content, accent and words, clarify is Jimmy's belief that by adopting the style or method of Black-American culture, they are empowering themselves. However, there is a certain point at which this is lost, and the infusion of a Dublin accent seems suspect and threatens the total diffusion of what they are appropriating.

Peter Barry's characterisation of his three phases of postcolonial literature may help further illustrate the complexities of such cultural exchange and appropriation. The first stage Barry terms the 'adopt phase'. This involves 'an unquestioning acceptance of the authority of European novels'. The second stage, the 'adapt phase' attempts to adapt the form but to a localised subject. In the final stage, the 'adept phase', there is 'a declaration of cultural independence', and the original *form* as well as subject matter is altered. As Barry explains, in this stage the emphasis is 'on 'cross-cultural' interactions'.<sup>12</sup> Although the band is not – in either of these phases – relating to a colonizing culture, the framework Barry provides proves relevant. By performing the songs as they stand, the band works through the 'adopt phase', and by reworking them to reflect a contemporary Dublin context the band enters into the 'adapt phase'. What the band never achieves is the 'adept phase', a stage that

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 195.

might have involved singing in their own accent (as The Pogues or The Proclaimers did), and would no doubt attest to a confident, independent identity.

Perhaps in order to simplify the plot, the Dublin lyrics do not make their way into the narrative of the film. It may also be down to the issue of obtaining specific rights for the songs. Certainly many of the songs in the book are replaced with alternative ones in the film. Marketing may have also been a consideration. After all, *The Commitments* as a feature film, unlike the film's fictional band, is not performing to a Dublin audience, but a transglobal film market where both language and accent are often censored. Still, the absence of the Dublin lyrics, if we are to go by Barry's postcolonial phases, suggests the film regresses, and ultimately moves further away from a more fluid, hybrid representation of identity. Timothy Taylor criticises the film for a general loss of the 'local flavour', exchanging Dublin slang for 'a more international English language'.<sup>13</sup> Language – and voice in particular – is crucial as a site upon which 'Doyle inscribes identity'.<sup>14</sup> Taylor explains the loss as resulting from its positioning for a global market (largely American), but more harshly he places the blame on its English director.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the band's self-conscious performance of 'Black-American Soul' when contrasted to the candid rendering of Hollywood-styled Irish stereotypes, may work to highlight the constructed nature of identity in a way akin to that which Judith Butler attributes to masquerade and drag in its capacity to reveal the artificial structures beneath.<sup>16</sup>

*The Commitments* achieved great success critically and financially. So great, in fact, Doyle claims many people want to make films from his books even if they haven't read them. The success of *The Commitments* labels Doyle's fiction, no matter what it is, a

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<sup>13</sup> Taylor, 'Living in a Postcolonial World', p. 298.

<sup>14</sup> Lorraine Piroux, "'I'm Black an' I'm Proud": Re-Inventing Irishness in Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments*', *College Literature*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1998, pp. 45-57: 46.

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, 'Living in a Postcolonial World', p. 298.

<sup>16</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

silverscreen goldmine. As Doyle explained, initially people are interested in his work, regardless of the story, but then ultimately 'flick through it looking for jokes! [and ask] "Where do they sing Mustang Sally?"'<sup>17</sup> Doyle sees this stereotype as an obstacle he must struggle against. It is not surprising then that he consciously set out to create something different with *The Snapper* and *The Van*.

What is interesting about Doyle's comments is not just that the producers are interested in the jokes, but that they are specifically looking for the music. *The Snapper* had little music and although *The Van* involved a soundtrack composed by Eric Clapton, it was far from resembling the soundtrack governing the narrative of *The Commitments*, which has more in common with its director's previous film, *Fame*. More accurately, the film's heavy reliance on the soundtrack is reflective of Doyle's novel and the many detailed descriptions of the songs, rehearsals and performances. Doyle explained that in some ways 'the music imposed the style'.<sup>18</sup> Although some critics initially felt the film carried 'a boisterous music soundtrack but patchy story',<sup>19</sup> the soundtrack became crucial in the film's marketing and distribution.

*The Commitments* was co-scripted with Roddy Doyle, Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais (the television team who wrote *The Likely Lads* and *Porridge* among several other sitcoms) and like other films adapted from novels by Doyle, it retains much of the original dialogue. It is unique when compared to other adaptations because of Roddy Doyle's sparse, script-like writing and the effect this has on the various processes of adaptation. Similar to the other novels of *The Barrytown Trilogy*, *The Commitments* consists largely of dialogue and contains little exposition describing the characters or setting. Even though dialogue and limited use of exposition is suggestive of the setting, it lacks the detail of description that

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<sup>17</sup> Redhead, 'New Island: Roddy Doyle', p. 43.

<sup>18</sup> Redhead, 'New Island: Roddy Doyle', p. 38.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Kermode, 'The Commitments', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 2, no. 1, May 1992, p. 66.

the mise-en-scène of the film version would later add. Evidence of Doyle's concise style includes the narrative transitions. Ticking over at a rapid pace, the shifts from one scene to the next are designated simply with a line break, or gap. The minimal transitions mimic the style of film and its ability to cut across time and space through editing.

Virginia Woolf, in her essay, 'The Cinema', refers to the medium's advantage of smoothly crossing time and space which is impossible in a written text and results in the 'gulfs which dislocate the novels'.<sup>20</sup> Woolf cites the 'sameness of background' from one scene to the next as the reason film offers a smoother transition than that possible through words. In other words, the image may offer a visual continuity that draws attention away from a lack of narrative continuity. The cinema has increased the flexibility of narrative structure, enabling the narrative to move practically anywhere in time and space while still being easily comprehended by its audiences. So easily comprehended and anticipated are these techniques that contemporary literature often adopts them as its own.

Doyle's narrative transitions do not reflect the idea of the cinema that Woolf proposes, neither smoothing over their existence nor suggesting a visual continuity to compensate for a lack of narrative continuity. Instead, Doyle's transitions presume the ability of the contemporary reader to assimilate the brief scenes into a whole narrative. Often this presumption is also reliant on the reader's familiarity with cinematic structures.<sup>21</sup> Frequent and abrupt shifts in time and space become an accepted feature of the narrative and like the cinema, the cutting between scenes, and the repetition of the narrative, causes little disorientation. The structure instead links itself thematically and works to build up the tension of the narrative in a similar way that the film calls on a rapid succession of images for building narrative excitement. In certain instances, several scenes occur on the same page, composed of only a dozen or so lines.

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<sup>20</sup>Virginia Woolf, 'The Cinema', *Collected Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1996), p. 272.

In one particular passage of the book, there are four brief 'scenes' on one page all describing the lead-up to the band's performance at the community centre. The first scene, depicts the visual image of the poster for the band in a half dozen lines. '—Saturday, 24 March, it said across the top. —In The Community Centre, The Hardest Working Band In The World, The Saviours of Soul.' This section, offering narrative exposition in a similar way the camera would relay the information through a close-up shot of a poster, is immediately followed by three asterisks, dividing it from the next passage. This second segment develops entirely from the dialogue between Jimmy and Billy about Billy's increasing dislike for Deco which will lead to the build-up of friction between the two and culminate in an argument at the community centre gig. Similarly the final two passages on the page present a key moment solely through the characters' dialogue: one depicts the band discussing new songs, and the other involves a discussion between Joey and Jimmy about who will do the mixing for the gig (p. 73). Throughout the novel, the narrative is often built on the succession of these brief 'scenes', which may be pulled together to form the whole. Little of the narrative is devoted to setting up exposition. Instead, it moves directly into the plot and conflict and unravels the details as the narrative progresses.

For example, the opening pages of the novel could almost be characterised as a series of vignettes. Although the film's opening sequence relies on the words in that it employs a regional voice-over (Jimmy Jr.) in order to quickly establish the narrative, several other themes which will recur throughout are identified in the *mise-en-scène* of the Dublin market. Immediately following, several brief scenes establish the trajectory of the narrative and introduce us to most of the band's members. Instead of gradually introducing us to the narrative in the same way that the film deliberately pinpoints setting and character in a concise methodological fashion, the novel cuts in mid-sentence. Outspan informs Derek '—We'll ask Jimmy...Jimmy'll know.' Within a page we learn what it is exactly they

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<sup>21</sup> Seymour Chatman, in *Story and Discourse*, makes a similar point, that dialogue requires more effort from the reader in order to construct the narrative, p. 175.

are asking about - trying to find a new direction for their band - but with very little exposition. While the establishing sequence opening the film builds up the narrative in a calculated, almost formulaic manner, the novel moves in immediately and relies on the reader to fill in the details. These opening scenes of the novel, like many throughout the narrative, rely entirely on dialogue, and are described anonymously as being set in a 'pub' in the novel. The film must also economise on form and retains much of the dialogue but utilises the sequence to establish other details through the mise-en-scène and soundtrack.

It is clear in the close examination of the film and novel's opening that a personal interpretation of the mise-en-scène is unavoidable to the adapting filmmaker. What we 'see' on screen will undoubtedly be attributed to the 'reading' proffered by the director, rather than Doyle. Accordingly, Parker, in contrast to the filmmakers of *Cal*, arguably guilty of playing down 'The Troubles' for the sake of overseas marketing strategies, has been accused of overloading the narrative with visual references depicting Ireland as a 'war-zone'.<sup>22</sup> While the camera might pick up on various details, it does not seem to overly rely on the representation of violence. Instead, Parker's 'additions' to the film seem more likely presented to reinforce its alliance with Hollywood and enable an easily identifiable perception of 'Irishness'. Fintan O'Toole has discussed these additions at some length, pointing to various scenes added by Parker. For example, O'Toole points out that the boy going into the lift of a tower block with a horse, even though it was added *after* Parker and his crew witnessed such an incident, is most likely only there because it conforms to the Hollywood cinematic stereotype. The confession scenes in particular O'Toole says are added for 'local color, the equivalent of grass skirts in a movie set in Hawaii, or kilts in a movie set in Scotland'.<sup>23</sup> In fact, there are no references to Catholicism in the novel, or in Doyle's screenplay, nor for that matter nor does it play a significant role in *The Snapper* or

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<sup>22</sup> See Don Kunz, 'Alan Parker's adaptation of Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments*', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2001, pp. 53-57.

<sup>23</sup> Fintan O'Toole, 'Working-Class Dublin on Screen: The Roddy Doyle Films', *Cineaste*, vol. 24, no. 2-3, 1999, pp. 36-39: 37.

*The Van*. Nevertheless, O'Toole prefers the visual representation of *The Snapper*, *The Family*, and *The Van* for the very fact that they avoid 'local color', following Doyle's style of narration, which deems the explanation of surroundings irrelevant, a style O'Toole, likens more to the style of a soap opera. He writes: 'In their work with Roddy Doyle, both Stephen Frears and Michael Winterbottom have been faithful to the spirit of his writing by refusing to make this assumption. They have found visual equivalents for the general style of Doyle's writing, in which Irishness is a function of character and language, not of place'.<sup>24</sup> O'Toole makes it clear that Doyle's lack of expositional detail in the novel should not be read as an opening for the director's own development of the mise-en-scène, but rather as a narrative strategy in itself. Here O'Toole stresses the importance of remaining 'faithful' to the text, or to the 'spirit' of Doyle's style. He identifies success through the avoidance of characterising 'place' in favour of 'character and language'.

Like O'Toole, Martin McLoone criticises the film for adopting a stereotyped form of representation. He has described *The Commitments* as 'a rock-musical ... a Hollywood film in all its essential elements and as such ... required to present aspects of Ireland that are "recognisable" to the Hollywood audience. The result is a set of urban and Irish clichés that were absent in Doyle's original work'.<sup>25</sup> McLoone also detects the intrusive influence of Hollywood. However, perhaps the transition from page to screen, rather than being entirely accounted for by Hollywood's limited interpretation of 'Irishness', is more generally speaking a condition of the classical narrative structure of Hollywood cinema and its reliance on reductive archetypes, or stereotypes. In many instances in *The Commitments* the archetypal restructuring for the cinematic narrative is evident.

For example, the character 'Joey The Lips Fagan', takes on fabled proportions, his entrance to the film serving as a sort of *deus ex machina*. In the novel Joey's appearance has a

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<sup>24</sup> O'Toole, 'Working-Class Dublin on Screen', p. 38.

<sup>25</sup> Martin McLoone, *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (London: BFI, 2000), p. 205, referencing O'Toole, 'Working-Class Dublin on Screen', pp. 36-37.



similar effect, ensuring afterwards that 'Jimmy was delighted' and 'He knew now that everything was going to be all right. The Commitments were going to be. They had 'Joey The Lips Fagan'. And that man had enough soul for all of them. He had God too.' (28). Even though Joey is clearly a crucial force in the narrative's progression, his importance is explained through an explanatory thread in the novel which requires a rather different treatment in the visual form. In the film, Joey's arrival offers an interesting take on the arrival of the 'hero' in classical film narration, but with similar effect. Joey arrives on a scooter before crashing into the rubbish bins. This entrance contrasts to previous ones in terms of duration. We are unable to see his face beneath his helmet, adding to the mystery. When they first speak the camera avoids him. We only see the back of his head and his crucifix earring dangling down - the only thing in focus in this shot. The cinematographic style generates the feeling of Joey as 'saviour' in strong visual terms. Jimmy's father furthers this connection by saying Joey is 'a godsend on a moped', humorously diffusing the archetype.

In Aristotle's *Poetics*, *deus ex machina* is described as a device necessary only 'for events external to the drama—for antecedent or subsequent events, which lie beyond the range of human knowledge, and which require to be reported or foretold; for to the gods we ascribe the power of seeing all things'.<sup>26</sup> In this respect, Joey becomes too good to be true and the religious connotations link him with god and the supernatural. Throughout the narrative the authenticity of his character is increasingly validated, only to be undermined in the ending, when he explains he is leaving to play with Joe Tex, and Jimmy later remembers Joe Tex is dead.

Throughout the novel and film, the narration persists with a style reminiscent of the epic structure Aristotle describes. Although many times in both the novel and film the perspective is primarily Jimmy's, the style of narration varies, pulling back into a rather

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<sup>26</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. S.H. Butcher, intro. Francis Fergusson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), p. 82.

distant, fairytale narrative. For example, in one particular passage in the novel the typical fashion of offering exposition through dialogue is broken and replaced with narration.

The time flew in. Those Commitments still learning their instruments improved. The ones ready were patient. There was no group rehearsing. Jimmy wouldn't allow it. They all had to be ready first. (p. 30)

Here the narration depicts the action in a very distant, objective, 'voice of God' style.

Similarly, the film's epic structure and rapid, consistent development of the narrative, objectifies the band members in a similar way to the documentary or docudrama. The fact that many of the actors were trained musicians in their first acting role only reinforces this effect. The progression of the narrative through the mock interview is another way in which the film offers exposition, and develops the story through the main characters' own words. Jimmy is then assumed to be the one telling the story. However, instances such as when 'Joey The Lips Fagan' arrives, as a form of *deus ex machina*, remind us there are events outside the control of Jimmy's narration.

For example, Jimmy's mock interview narration, which persists throughout the film, but also concludes it, follows-up on the lives of the band members after the split, and informs us that the man who Joey claimed he was leaving Ireland for to play with - Joe Tex - died in 1982. This is the moment at which Joey's status as saviour is unravelled by the validity of his claims. It re-establishes the reality of Jimmy's environment, and the narrative becomes an almost fantasy-like digression. However, in the film, Jimmy's encounter with Wilson Pickett's limo renders the distinction more complex, and suggests there are degrees of reality and truth.

The film's ending diverges significantly from the book's, which leads Jimmy and a few of the band's other members into forming a country rock/punk band - one example of the many narrative strands lost in the film version. Jimmy justifies the band's musical transition by saying 'Joey said when he left tha' he didn't think soul was righ' for Ireland. This stuff is though. You've got to remember tha' half the country is fuckin' farmers. This

is the type o' stuff they all listen to.' While it may prove futile in the study of adaptation to mourn the series of losses in the transition from page to screen, this alteration in light of several others marks a key departure in the film's consideration of identity from that of the novel's. In the novel, to go from a connection with Ireland and Black America to Ireland and country music, traditionally representative of the white American South, draws attention to the tenuousness of Afro-Celtic connections. By exposing the ease with which one representation is traded for the next, Doyle is hinting at the fluidity of identity, as well as its inherent contradictions. Doyle's emphasis on the performative nature of various cultural stereotypes inadvertently refers back to various representations of Ireland, including those perpetuated by Hollywood. By revealing the limitations of fixed cultural representations, Doyle argues in favour of plurality and diversity. Perhaps this is most obvious when the reasons for the band's break-up are considered. When Jimmy explained how the Northsiders were the blacks of Dublin, matters are complicated when one of the members reminds him that he is not a Northsider. While he might maintain his status as a black man of Ireland, his position as a black man of Dublin is usurped. Dean, likewise, preferred Jazz to Soul. In the end, the formation of The Commitments, and 'Dublin soul', was too restricting to encompass all of the personalities. Accordingly, Jimmy's attempts to make the band appear more uniform, by forcing them to wear suits, ultimately fails to erase their own individual desires. The ability to develop a unified, single identity eventually proves impossible.

Because many of the features of Doyle's narrative that serve to develop the contradictory nature of cultural identity and its performance fail to make it to the screen, the film offers a somewhat different reading. By exchanging local references in Doyle's novel, perhaps with what O'Toole acerbically describes as the Hollywood additions of 'local color' in the film, the tension set up between forms of representation in the original is lost. For example, because the irony of the band's shift to country music is omitted, or the implementation of local references into the lyrics is no longer evident, any access to the

local is *almost* entirely cut off (this is solely in reference to the music, speaking of the film in general, we would have to acknowledge the accents of the characters as serving this function). Instead, the film becomes a celebration of what Doyle's novel deems futile (i.e. the homogeneous representation of identity). If we look back to Barry's phases of postcolonial literature, only this time reconsidering the terms with Hollywood in the role of the 'coloniser', it may be possible to reassess the film in terms of the stage it marks in the phase of developing an 'Irish National Cinema'. In this respect, we can say that the film is best described by reference to the characteristics of Barry's second stage, the 'adapt phase'. The film adapts an Irish subject to the general form of Hollywood cinema. Like the band itself, the film does not fully stretch towards the 'adept phase' in which the form it is adopting is renegotiated. In many ways, it is this failure to reach this third and final phase which renders the film flawed. Although the film's role in British cinema further complicates matters, the influence of the mythic structural forms of Hollywood, calling for a standardisation of representation which so often results in stereotyping, is undeniably felt throughout the film. What O'Toole and McLoone appear to mourn is the fact that, like the band avoiding the use of their own accent, the film avoids developing its own voice.

### ***The Snapper***

In Stephen Frears' film version of *The Snapper*, Roddy Doyle's story of teenage pregnancy and the loving support of a father is recast as two competing narratives offering the perspective of both the teenage mother and her father. Although the father's character is a necessary component of the original novel, often surfacing in first-person narration, the narration of his daughter Sharon is the primary focus. But this is altered in the film version which focuses the narrative more solidly on the changes occurring within his character as he reacts and adjusts to his young daughter's pregnancy.

However, Sharon's point-of-view is hardly ignored, and much of the first-person narration in Doyle's novel is evident in the use of voice-over, illustrating her experiences emotionally. Like the Francie Brady voice-over in *The Butcher Boy*, it adds emotional

depth to the film's realist surfaces and offers another mode in which to identify with the primary characters. Although Doyle has expressed his own reluctance to employ the use of voice-over and has said that he's always

despite the evidence, had a thing against voice-overs. I immediately think of John Boy Walton, and I think of that film *A River Runs Through It* [Robert Redford, 1992], which I think is an appalling film, so lazy— instead of the story you had Robert Redford's voice every ten minutes with little sepia coloured photographs filling in gaps.<sup>27</sup>

He acknowledges Stephen Frears for the successful employment of voice-over in *The Snapper*, which in some cases saved 'a potentially dull scene'.<sup>28</sup>

Voice-over makes its first appearance in the film when Sharon is on the bus reading a pregnancy book. The facts detailing the experiences she will soon undergo are relayed in her own voice and bridge the next shot of her vomiting in the toilet, producing a somewhat ironic and comic effect. Here the details of a pregnancy book, mediated by Sharon's first person narration in the novella, evidences itself in the film. She describes in the book how 'she read about her hormones and what they were doing to her. She could picture them; little roundy balls with arms and legs. She hoped her bowel movements stayed fairly regular. Her uterus would soon be pressing into her bladder' (p. 156). In the narration these facts become an integral part of the narrative if we are to understand the anxiety Sharon is experiencing. Still, the presentation of the factual information in the voice-over in some ways seems to work in the manner Doyle speaks of resisting. Literally 'filling in the gaps', the voice-over forms a bridge between visual images, and in this particular instance relays expository information, serving merely as a quick and efficient way of delivering relevant details of the story.

However, in other instances, the voice-over, or more generally speaking a subjective soundtrack presenting the thoughts and impressions going on in Sharon's head, clearly

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<sup>27</sup> Roddy Doyle, 'Interview', *Film Ireland*, no. 41, Jun/Jul 94, pp. 10-13.

identifies itself as necessary for the full understanding of Sharon's character. In these moments the soundtrack becomes representative of the numerous pressures surrounding her. In addition to the bombardment of information the pregnancy book initiates, the soundtrack once again reverts to Sharon's subjective viewpoint when she is in the pub with her friends telling them of her experiences in the hospital. At this point the multitude of sounds and voices come back to haunt her and the soundtrack. In this way, the soundtrack harking back to unpleasant events in the past, threatens to pull the visuals into a flashback. In one particular scene, the words of George Burgess (the father of her child) interrupt the scene. His words, 'are you all right Sharon', refer back to the night she is raped by her father's peer outside a pub. The soundtrack in this instance serves as a sort of narrative prompt and the actual event is subsequently visualised in the following scene when Sharon is in bed, through flashback. Another example of this occurs when her imaginings of her friends' and neighbours' thoughts about her are initially represented through the soundtrack – as literally the voices in her head – before being met with corresponding dream-like images.

Likewise, the father's perspective dominates much of both the written and filmic narrative. The novella explores a range of perspectives, alternating from various points-of-view, even, a couple of times, George Burgess'. But for the most part, Sharon, and her father's, point-of-view remain central throughout, offering a somewhat different take on the depiction of teenage pregnancy as a narrative exploring the role of the grandfather. Towards the end of Doyle's novella, Jimmy Sr. reflects:

There was more to life than drinking pints with your mates. There was Veronica, his wife, and his children. Some of his own sperms had gone into making them so, fuck it, he was responsible for them. But, my Jaysis, he'd made one poxy job of it so far...Darren and Linda and Tracy and even Leslie, were still young enough, and then there'd be Sharon's little snapper as well. A strong active man in the house, a father figure, would be vital for Sharon's snapper. (p. 320)

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<sup>28</sup> Doyle, 'Interview', p. 10.

Jimmy Sr.'s realisation of the importance of his role as a father and, soon, a grandfather, becomes an essential ingredient of the novella and also the film. The film emphasises this important role by intercutting scenes between Sharon and her father as they are both developing, independently but at a similar pace. Immediately following this passage, the narrative is drawn outwards from Jimmy's personal reflection into a conversation with his friend Bimbo. What we have read as an internal narration ending - 'A strong active man in the house, a father figure, would be vital for Sharon's snapper' - is then recalled in the conversation with Bimbo as he explains: '-Vital, Bimbo. Vital. -Oh God, yes, Bimbo'd agreed'. The narrative, briefly dipping in and out of various scenes, once again recalling Doyle's other work, connotes the technique of cutting across time and space, readily available to the medium of film.

On the other hand, this blending of narrative fragments, occurring throughout *The Snapper*, functions rather differently from *The Commitments*. Instead of enabling the breathless task of establishing and involving a large range of characters, the technique is employed in *The Snapper* to establish a level of intimacy between Sharon and her father. Often, we cut between the experiences of Sharon and Jimmy Sr., in an effort to create the ironic blending of the two different experiences. For example, within a couple of pages the scene may shift perspective four or five times. On one particular occasion, the narration moves from Sharon scrutinising herself in her parents' wardrobe mirror, to a discussion of Jimmy Sr. and Sharon's relationship and Jimmy Sr.'s anger at seeing George Burgess, to Jimmy Sr. in the pub telling a sexually explicit joke, to Jimmy Sr. at home watching the twins, to Jimmy Sr. coming on to his wife, and then back to Sharon with her friend Jackie again.

Some might see Doyle's slant as a fresh take on the teen pregnancy narrative, others might view it as usurping Sharon's control over her own story. Questioned about the focus on masculinity in his fiction, Roddy Doyle explained that '*The Snapper* was as much about a

woman as a man'.<sup>29</sup> There is some truth in Doyle's comments. However, narratives focusing on teen pregnancy by their very nature generally do involve a woman as their central character (and should do). Doyle's ability to construct a narrative centred around a female character is undeniable. His subsequent novel, *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*, convincingly submerges the reader in the world of a tormented woman and attests to his ability to cross genders in his writing.<sup>30</sup> It is Doyle's decision to include the grandfather as the narrative's central focus that is unusual. Doyle attributes the difficulty of writing this book to the fact that it is straddling both worlds - 'the crude world of the pub and the "woman's world" as well'.<sup>31</sup> Still, like the narrative structuring of *The Commitments*, it is this frequent cutting back and forth within the fiction, between Jimmy Sr. and Sharon's narrative perspective, that renders it cinematic.

However, the involvement of Sharon's father's narrative is intensified in the film version and perhaps results in the lessening in importance of her own struggle. Ruth Barton has criticised *The Snapper* because it 'does not confront the issue of teenage pregnancy, rather it assimilates it', so that 'the threat of the single mother bringing up her child in a non-paternalistic family unit is dispelled'.<sup>32</sup> The film version of *The Snapper* shares its subject matter with other films such as Margo Harkin's *Hush-A-Bye-Baby* (1989), focusing on teenage pregnancy in Ireland. Harkin's film, however, takes a much more serious view, its tragic narrative far removed from the comic undertones of Doyle's characteristic style. The central character, Goretti, who becomes pregnant, and is living amongst a Catholic community in Derry, like Sharon attempts to hide her situation. *Hush-a-Bye-Baby*, as Martin McLoone has pointed out, addresses the narrow frame within which women must view themselves in Catholic Ireland, and ultimately the film 'reserves most of its anger for

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<sup>29</sup> Redhead, 'New Island: Roddy Doyle', p. 44.

<sup>30</sup> Roddy Doyle, *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996).

<sup>31</sup> Redhead, 'New Island: Roddy Doyle', p. 44.



the attitude of the Catholic church to women'.<sup>33</sup> It is interesting that in Fidelma Farley's analysis of maternity in Irish cinema – specifically focusing on Harkin's film – *The Snapper* is never addressed. Farley's interest, lying primarily in the possibilities of the maternal narratives' 're-working and updating [of] an already established trope',<sup>34</sup> is perhaps unattainable in Doyle's and Parker's approach to the subject matter. Rather than having Sharon as central to the narrative, a technique Farley argues 'is a way of attempting to reconcile the traditional image of Irish women as mothers',<sup>35</sup> the narrative harks back to a more conventional model centred around male society. *The Snapper* does not take issue with Catholicism and indeed, as Barton observes, the focus on teenage pregnancy is downplayed, perhaps because the shock is not so much that Sharon is pregnant, but rather who she is pregnant by.

In other words, the largest obstacle Sharon confronts is that the baby's father might be a neighbour and peer of her father, George Burgess. Still, she conceals her pregnancy and is met first with surprise, then forced admiration from her friends. Her parents, not pleased, want to know who the father is, and if he is black. Sharon refuses her father's suggestion of having an abortion. When discussing the issue later with his wife Veronica, they comfort themselves with the fact that other people's children in the community have babies, again downplaying the teenage pregnancy as a problematic occurrence. The film emphasises that what the neighbours think is of no importance. As Veronica, Sharon's mother says to her husband 'Fuck the neighbours' (p. 151). What is unmistakably the issue, and what is revealed to be the 'real' reason for Sharon's concealment of her pregnancy, is that the father is the father of her friend, and much older than she. This concern becomes

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<sup>32</sup> Ruth Barton, 'Feisty Colleens and Faithful Sons: Gender in Irish Cinema', *Cineaste*, vol. 24, no. 2-3, 1999, 40-45: 42.

<sup>33</sup> McLoone, *Irish Film*, p. 148.

<sup>34</sup> Farley, 'Interrogating Myths of Maternity', p. 221.

<sup>35</sup> Farley, 'Interrogating Myths of Maternity', p. 221.

crucial in the manner in which Sharon is represented in both the book and the film, informing the degree of significance the issue of teenage pregnancy garners.

In other ways too, Sharon's narrative voice is limited on screen. In the film, the sex scene with George Burgess is told through flashbacks. Most of the film, as with the book, involves the repression of this incident. Sharon even seems to convince herself that he is not the father. However, the film seems to lack one crucial development of the novella. In the novella's depiction of the rape scene, we learn that:

She was glad she didn't remember much about it. The bits she did remember were disgusting...She'd been really drunk, absolutely paralytic...She'd made it back to her table and she just sat there, trying not to think about getting sick...Then it was blank...She was going to be sick. She rushed and pushed over the dance floor, past the toilets, outside because she wanted cold air. ...Pity. She couldn't move really. Then there was a hand on her shoulder. – 'Alright', Sharon? He'd said. Then it was blank and then they were kissing rough –she wasn't really: her mouth was just open –and then blank again and that was it really –or just he'd done it –standing up because that was the way she was in the next bit she remembered. (pp. 184-185)

In this passage, Sharon's descriptions of what she can and can't remember suggests rape.

But as Sharon does herself, the film rushes over the episode in order to forget it. In the film we are only privy to the 'truth' Sharon delivers to her family and friends, and therefore never *really* know what happened. As Sharon's narration explains in the novel, 'It wasn't like a moving memory, like a film. It was more like a few photographs' (p. 184). In the film, we get exactly what Sharon says it wasn't, a flashback, or a moving memory.

Perhaps if we were offered the photographs Sharon describes, more like the style Doyle admits abhorring in films such as *A River Runs Through It*, the significant point that Sharon was raped would not be lost. Although the film offers a brief objective analysis, it leaves room for questions about whether or not Sharon was interested in Burgess and perhaps intentionally, it clears the complexity of the narrative in a way that is common to the practice of adaptation. This also seems the most likely explanation for other features of the novella suggestive of rape or child abuse that are also absent in the film version. For example, sprinkled throughout the novella are references to child abuse. It is her father's,

Jimmy Rabbitte Sr.'s concern for the abuse of young children, 'snappers even', that seems paradoxical in light of his teenage daughter's likely abuse (p. 244).

As has already been discussed at some length in the section on *The Commitments*, adaptation usually entails the condensation of narrative. Characters are lost altogether and intricate plots are simplified.<sup>36</sup> This is one explanation for the film's loss of various narrative details. It is interesting, however, that criticism seems to circulate around certain points of the narrative in which condensation is most evident. The shifting of narrative focus, bringing the father closer to the forefront, ultimately seems to have compromised the strength of Sharon's voice.

### *The Van*

*The Van*, the concluding part of *The Barrytown Trilogy*, extends themes explored in the first two novels, but diverges in various stylistic ways. *The Van* is the longest instalment of *The Barrytown Trilogy*, comprising three hundred pages, almost half of the complete edition of the trilogy. In addition to its length, *The Van* involves a different treatment of narrative. Not unlike the other novels of the trilogy, *The Van*, remains characteristically marked with Doyle's heavy reliance on dialogue. And again, Doyle continues in this novel to organise the narrative into several scenes designated by breaks in the page, without any *traditional form of narrative transition* from one scene to the next. This narrative technique, reminiscent of a screenplay without stage directions, seems to suggest that, like *The Snapper* and *The Commitments*, it lacks information regarding the mise-en-scène that the camera will later incorporate. However, the lengthiness of this narrative, in comparison with the other two novels, may be explained by the heightened focus on narrative exposition and the running commentary of the events relaying the emotions of its

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<sup>36</sup> Seymour Chatman presents the idea of the 'kernel', or the central components of the plot, versus the 'satellites', or extraneous details. This might also be compared to Metz's idea of 'condensation', or 'a matrix of semantic convergence'. See Chatman's *Story and Discourse* and 'What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (And Vice Versa)', *Critical Inquiry*, no. 7, 1980, pp. 121-140. See also Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* (Chicago and Oxford: University of Chicago Press with permission of University of Oxford Press, 1974).

central character, Jimmy Rabbitte Sr. In this way, *The Van* appears to be a more traditional narrative, calling on narration, instead of dialogue, to move the plot along.

Although the title appears emblematic of the van's central importance to the narrative, the van does not make its appearance until over a hundred pages in. Instead, Jimmy Rabbitte Sr. is the focus of the first sixty or so pages. Unemployed and struggling with his identity, Jimmy's situation worsens as he is forced to acknowledge the reality that he cannot afford to buy what he wants for his family at Christmas. His uneasiness with his status is even more explicitly revealed by his heated reaction to his eldest son attempting to assist him financially by offering him a five-pound note. Even though there are instances in which Jimmy Sr. appears to adopt a more positive outlook and considers his possession of free time an opportunity to do things he has always wanted to do, his agitation expressed at his son's offer reveals a deep-seated irritation. Immediately following the encounter, Sharon finds him in the bedroom facing a door. 'He'd been in there since Jimmy Jr'd left.' The narrative further describes how Jimmy Sr. 'looked miserable, and small and kind of beaten up looking'. When Sharon expresses concern, Jimmy Sr. tries to explain he is fine and that nothing is wrong, but as the narration explains after Sharon leaves, 'he'd had to snap his eyes shut, waiting for the crunch and the pain. But then it had stopped, and he'd started breathing again. He felt weak now, a bit weak' (pp. 372-374). The unexplained sickness he feels surfaces a few more times throughout the novel, including an instance when he argues with his close friend, Bimbo. However, the pain seems temporarily alleviated when Bimbo loses his job and becomes an 'ally', accompanying Jimmy on his daily routines. It is Bimbo's entrance into the central narration that will lead to the introduction of the title's focus, the chip van. Still, like *The Snapper*, Jimmy Sr. and his troubled masculinity is the real focus of the narration. Only in this instance rather than Jimmy Sr. being drawn into the central focus of the narration, he is more conventionally placed at the centre of the narration from the start.

The film version of *The Van* was directed by Stephen Frears (who also adapted *The Snapper*) and features a soundtrack by Eric Clapton. Unexpectedly, the film cuts the first sixty pages of the novel and begins at the point when the van is introduced. Opening with a long shot of an open field as a van drives across the frame, the film quickly establishes the importance of the van the title suggests. However, the first scene begins before the van becomes known to its characters and opens with Bimbo hunched over the edge of the bar crying and then lifting his head to Jimmy Sr. (or Larry, in the film version) to explain he's been 'knocked back'. Similarly, in the book he says he was 'Let go. —I'm like you now, Jimmy, wha'. A man o'leisure' (p. 412). In this scene, the film quickly establishes Bimbo's predicament, anticipating the motivation leading to the film's title. What it sacrifices is the in-depth lead-up to this scene, detailing Jimmy Sr.'s own unemployment and struggle. Although certain sequences are later incorporated into the film's narration, much of the narrative from the novella's opening is lost. For example, certain family members disappear. The twin daughters are cut, and more importantly Jimmy Jr. who returns home with his new fiancée, financially independent, and serving as a successful counterpoint to his father's feelings of failure, is also absent from the film version. Similarly the younger son Darren, portrayed as independent in the novel, is depicted as a bright but awkward child on screen. An important passage, after Jimmy Jr.'s return home, in which Jimmy Sr.'s attempts to quiet his son's negative comments at the dinner table by reminding him whose hand is feeding him, but is quickly shot down by Jimmy Jr.'s reply that it is the state, is kept, but is voiced by the younger son, Darren (or Kevin in the film). Most obviously, it is part of the process of adaptation which requires the condensation of plot and elimination of unnecessary characters.

Unlike *The Snapper*, Doyle adapted this film entirely himself, a fact which may offer a simple explanation for the significant alteration from the original. In other words, a writer is more likely to feel comfortable with condensing his own material than adapting someone else's material. A screenwriter adapting someone else's novel may not completely adopt

the role of 'the author' and make significant changes. However, the difference in methods of adaptation seems more likely to refer back to the style of the original novel itself. The differences of narrative technique referred to earlier diverge significantly from what I would call Doyle's screenplay format. The added exposition of *The Van* renders the novel difficult to adapt. It is not until the end when the scenes seem to shorten as the novel flashes between brief passages detailing the matches, domestic scenes, and the progress of the van, that the narrative builds up quickly and progressively, working between parallel scenes through a repetition reminiscent of the techniques employed in film in order to achieve dramatic unity. Like the sequences in which the band is created in *The Commitments*, in *The Van* the entire film builds to get to this point. *The Commitments*, on the other hand, begins from this point.

Doyle structures the screenplay in a way that is common to filmmaking. The story begins in *medias res*. As most screenwriting manuals will point out 'the beginning of a story is necessarily an arbitrary point...The circumstances that have brought about the conflict with which the screenplay deals can usually be ascribed to things that happened long before the opening FADE IN.'<sup>37</sup> In this particular discussion of the 'premise' it seems necessary that what becomes important in the film is the conflict. Even though Jimmy Sr.'s struggle serves as a central conflict in the book's narrative, it is Bimbo's unemployment that proves to be the central conflict initiating the development of the narrative. Rather than investing screen-time in detailing Jimmy Sr.'s inner turmoil, the narrative opts to condense the plot into a structure reminiscent of *The Commitments* by opening with a conflict, then following the rapid development up to the character's efforts to resolve the conflict, before a second conflict occurs, and we are left with the disintegration of the enterprise. This classical structure, familiar to many films, presents the spectator with a conflict and then a false resolution, which is revealed as such by further conflict before there is a final resolution. It

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<sup>37</sup> David Howard and Edward Mabley, *The Tools of Screenwriting* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), p. 49.

is a structure evident in the novel version of *The Commitments*, but one the novel of *The Van* must work towards.

One of the curious shifts *The Van* makes from novel to film lies in its representation of 'Irishness'. In the novel, Irishness is represented in relationship to what it is not (i.e. the Other). Most poignantly, in a scene absent from the film, when Jimmy and Bimbo visit a chip shop to observe how it is run, the Italian workers make jokes when they attempt to ask them questions. Annoyed, they decide to leave, and on their way out the door, Jimmy Sr. turns and gives 'them the fingers' saying 'Go back to your own country...Fuck the EEC.' The reluctance to consider Ireland within Europe, in exchange for identification as being first Irish, is prevalent throughout the book and for the most part is concerned with negotiating Irish masculinity within new conceptions of Ireland as 'European'. The chip shops referred to are always Italian, and when Bimbo's Burgers is opened and they are asked to explain why they don't do curried chips the explanation is that it's because it's an 'Irish Chipper', not anything else. In the film, for one reason or another, the opposition crucial for asserting an 'Irish' identity becomes diffused. The defeat that concretises the impossibility of Ireland winning the World Cup is of course to the Italian team. But the Italian chip shop disappears, and in its place is a Vietnamese van, and later an American motif one. Like the novel's scenario in which a girl orders curried chips, the film includes this scene and the narrative's positing of Irishness as 'not something else' remains, although slightly altered. The positioning of Irishness against Europe is not as explicit as in the novel, but as the football matches, particularly against the English and the Italians, illustrate, the 'imagining' of Ireland here is at its most powerful. As the excitement over the matches builds, Irish flags appear outside homes. Irish flags appear throughout the film, on houses, on fans painted and in costume, and more importantly, covering the back of the van's shutter.

The film's general avoidance of the negotiation of European identity at the heart of the novella may account for what O'Toole points to as the film's success (i.e. the avoidance of

the tendency to add 'local color' in the way that he accuses *The Commitments* of doing). Still, in many ways the film unavoidably resembles all of the other adaptations of Doyle's fiction in its aims to present an Ireland distinct from its European counterparts, marked out by its signs of cinematic 'Irishness'. O'Toole's praise for *The Snapper* and *The Van* as films which identify a 'visual equivalent' for Doyle's style characterising Irishness as 'a function of character and language, not of place', resists the sort of visual interpretation that would realise the complexities of Doyle's portrayal of Irish identity and is more likely a symptom of the general criticism directed towards Doyle's most commercially successful adaptation. The remark by Lynda Myles, *The Snapper*'s producer, on the vast disparities between her film and *The Commitments*, rendering her adaptation 'intimate' in contrast to Alan Parker's, is suggestive of this same aversion. Just as many people approach Doyle because of the first successful adaptation, with the hope of securing the next *Commitments*, it is conceivable that a proportionate number of others exist who caution against that film's excess and success and express a preference for the more modest enterprises of *The Snapper* and *The Van*. However, the commercial success of the first film is difficult to see past, and even Doyle's imitative style of adapting *The Van* may be the consequence of his own consideration of that success and the desire not to be overwhelmed or silenced by it.



## 4. Christy Brown: *My Left Foot*

In 1989 *My Left Foot*, the film version of the autobiography of Christy Brown, a Dublin-born writer who suffered from cerebral palsy, was nominated for several Oscars, and received great critical acclaim.<sup>1</sup> It was produced by Noel Pearson, who bought the rights with his own money, and marked the directorial debut of Jim Sheridan, who had previous experience in the theatre but whose only encounter with the cinema had been an eight week film course in New York.<sup>2</sup> The director and producer would team up again for their next project, a screen-version of John Keane's play, *The Field*. Their first film's success undoubtedly represented a turning point in Irish filmmaking. The film's achievements, particularly at the Oscars, where its status as a 'foreign' film would so often be a hindrance, highlighted a key strength of Irish film in the American market: it doesn't need subtitles.<sup>3</sup> As Sheridan has pointed out, 'it was almost more exciting for Ireland—it gave the Irish a sense of identity and pride'.<sup>4</sup> Still, up until that point, as Sheridan has remarked, 'there hadn't been a successful Irish picture in recent memory, not even Neil Jordan's *High Spirits*, an American-Irish production'.<sup>5</sup> In this comment, Sheridan makes a key distinction, not just that there hadn't been a successful *Irish* film, a film originating in Ireland, but that there hadn't been a successful film with Ireland as its subject matter.

*My Left Foot*, based on Brown's remarkable autobiography, details his own life and struggle with cerebral palsy and forms a coming of age narrative. Brown's second novel,

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<sup>1</sup> Christy Brown, *My Left Foot* (London: Minerva, 1990). All further references will be to this edition. In addition to inspiring a cinematic adaptation, Brown's narrative was the source of inspiration for the song 'Down All the Days', by The Pogues. For the lyrics to the song, see [www.pogues.com/Releases/Lyrics/LPs/PeaceandLove/Downallthe](http://www.pogues.com/Releases/Lyrics/LPs/PeaceandLove/Downallthe). Their song refers to the title of Brown's second book, *Down All the Days* (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Talty, 'Pluck of the Irish', *American Film*, vol. xv, no. 12, September 1990, pp. 32-37.

<sup>3</sup> Although, as it has been discussed already, this is not always the case.

<sup>4</sup> Talty, 'Pluck of the Irish', p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Talty, 'Pluck of the Irish', p. 35.

*Down all the Days*, a reworking of *My Left Foot* in third person, bears more similarities with the form of the novel rather than autobiography, and expands the narration of the text to encompass an identification with several characters within the community. Brown, who also published several other novels, as well as some collections of poetry, wrote in a style that may be likened to Irish writers who preceded him, but also others that have followed. In the introduction to a collection of Brown's poems, Frank Delaney compares Brown's experience to the exiled existence of Yeats, Joyce and Beckett, arguing 'he was exiled by cerebral palsy, which stifled his verbal articulation and in some gorgeous epiphany blessed with movement only his left foot. So, he sat among the world, protected by his disability, and his spirit was like a winepress which poured out...' <sup>6</sup> Brown's medical condition in many ways connects him to a writer such as Bernard MacLaverty, writing about Ireland from a distance, affording him the scope of an outsider. But instead of the literal physical isolation of residing outside Ireland, Brown recounts a social isolation which afforded him an outside perspective of his own on Ireland.

### ***Production: Hollywood and Third Cinema***

*My Left Foot* was produced for a budget of two million pounds, fifty percent of which was put up by Granada Television,<sup>7</sup> an involvement that the film's producer maintained was a light-handed one. A somewhat absent sponsor, the company's physical presence on the set was felt only once during the entire production. As Pearson explained: 'We sent them the first week's rushes and that was the end of it.'<sup>8</sup> Certainly, the film's location, shot around Dublin and at Ardmore studios, suggests at least a geographical distance and independence. On the other hand, Sheridan has expressed a somewhat different relationship with the film's US distributor, Miramax. Still insisting on the film's

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<sup>6</sup> Christy Brown, *Collected Poems* (London: Minerva, 1982), p. ix.

<sup>7</sup> Ruth Picardie, 'My First Film', *Producer*, no. 9, Autumn 1989, p.20.

<sup>8</sup> Picardie, 'My First Film', p. 20.

independence from its financial backers, he reacts incredulously to Miramax's Harvey Weinstein's claims that *he* had control over the final cut.

I haven't seen it but I understand he's claimed - what he did to the film that he recut it. He, this is Harvey Weinstein, didn't do anything to the film. He changed one word from 'gobshite' to 'foolish'. He didn't know what the word 'gobshite' meant. There was nothing else changed. Now he did do a great marketing job, but he does interfere a lot.<sup>9</sup>

Both Sheridan's and Pearson's remarks reveal their own stages of mental adjustment which enable them to accept the backing of outside finances by insisting the input and effect is minimal. This is arguably a response which defensively pre-empts the film's negative reception, criticising the evidence of 'outside' involvement and refusing to accept the film as an *Irish* film.

In his study, *Irish Film: the Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema*, Martin McLoone dissects the boundaries of 'Irish Cinema' that this sort of response hints at. In order to establish what is understood in the notion of 'Irish cinema', McLoone relies on studies of the Third cinema as a reference point. By definition, McLoone ascribes to the idea of a Third cinema within Irish cinema, defined by its low budget and funded from within Ireland. Following this line of analysis, McLoone, defines the Second cinema as Irish directed films, produced by Hollywood money and accordingly, the First cinema is characterised by big budget films made outside of Ireland (or more specifically, Hollywood films with Ireland as their subject matter). Going by this roughly sketched outline of McLoone's argument, it is impossible for *My Left Foot* to qualify as Third cinema, a form which McLoone sees as crucial in supplying 'an emerging national cinema defined, not by an essentialist conception of Irishness, but by a desire to explore the contradictions and complexities of Irish identity as it looks inwards and backwards at its own history and outwards and forwards to its European future'.<sup>10</sup> Taking into account

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<sup>9</sup> Terry George, 'Home and Away', *Film Ireland*, August/September 1998, p. 8, and pp. 19-20: 8.

<sup>10</sup> McLoone, *Irish Film*, p. 128.

McLoone's hard line concerning the constraints on style and subject matter resulting from significant measures of overseas funding, the film falls under his definition of the Second cinema. It is not surprising, then, to discover that McLoone, who views Sheridan's second film, *The Field*, as suffering most from the compromises involving American backing,<sup>11</sup> identifies *My Left Foot* as 'by no means the worst offender', but still:

the fact remains that such financing inevitably involves compromises in the style and themes of the films. The danger is that, to attract financial support, such films propose a view of Ireland that is already familiar to international funders and which funders in turn believe audiences are likely to recognize and identify with.<sup>12</sup>

As already detailed in the introduction to this thesis, the adaptation of *The Field* not only involved a shift from stage to screen, but undeniably the Hollywood screen. The resulting film, styled as a Western and changing the identity of the outsider from English to American, rewrites the play's negotiations with Ireland and 'Britain' as a new mediation on Ireland and the United States, or perhaps even more aptly, Hollywood. This association, already witnessed in *Cal*, is also central to William McIlvanney's *The Big Man*, discussed in greater detail in a later chapter. Rather than exploring the 'complexities of Irish identity' that McLoone calls for in his visualisation of an 'emerging national cinema', and like the outsider in *The Field* whose vision is to pave over rural Ireland with US-styled freeways, the arrival of Hollywood financing poses the threat of levelling Irish texts within generic Hollywood contexts.

Interestingly, the film McLoone's study praises is *The Butcher Boy*, produced on a ten million dollar budget and backed by Warner Brothers. Although Neil Jordan explained it was a case of 'the biggest studio in the world' being involved, Jordan claims to be unable to 'think of a more non-mainstream film than this film'.<sup>13</sup> Even so, if *The Butcher Boy* is a

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<sup>11</sup> McLoone, *Irish Film*, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> McLoone, *Irish Film*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>13</sup> Ted Sheehy, 'The Butcher Boy', *Film Ireland*, February/March 1998, pp. 14-15: 14.

mainstream film that happens to be mainstream that still holds up under the definition of Third cinema, what *specifically* prevents *My Left Foot* from crossing the liminal boundary between Second and Third cinema in the same way? Sheridan and Pearson seem equally convinced that although the financing of the film was procured abroad, little influence is noted in the final product. Others would argue differently. Kevin Rockett questions the reasons for the film's success, asking 'is it any accident that the first Irish-produced film ever to win an Oscar, *My Left Foot*, is set in a depressing working-class environment and focuses on a disabled male?' He goes on to explain the film in relation to another of Sheridan's films:

[The] oedipal drama of a mother-son relationship is not unlike *In the Name of the Father*...which largely displaces politics in favour of another oedipal conflict, that between father and son. The point is that these films, whether family dramas or not, are ostensibly dealing with social or political issues, but often lose sight of the broader critiques of which they are capable due to the strictures imposed by Hollywood's three-act dramaturgy.<sup>14</sup>

Rockett's comments bear the familiar ring of the criticism surrounding several adaptations discussed thus far, like Roddy Doyle's *The Barrytown Trilogy*, or Bernard MacLaverty's *Cal*. Rockett points to the transformation from page to stage as evidence of the influence of Hollywood financing on the representation of Irishness on the big screen. *My Left Foot* has also been criticised not only for its Hollywood-assimilated representations of Ireland, but its representation of its original source. Rockett's lament for the 'broader critiques' absent in Hollywood-produced films echoes McLoone's call for complex representations rather than essentialist portraits of Irish identity, in order to establish a truly national cinema. In reality, filmmakers like Sheridan are increasingly adopting the Hollywood model and methods of support, and even, as in Sheridan's case, a perspective more closely identified with the American consciousness. For example, Sheridan's most recent film *In America* (2002), written, produced and directed by himself, is set in New York City and tells the story of a family from Ireland who have emigrated to America after the death of a

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<sup>14</sup> Kevin Rockett, 'Irish Cinema: The National in the International', p. 24.

child. On the other hand, even the success of Neil Jordan, who is capable of producing a film he describes as 'non-mainstream' from mainstream backing, is not without end. Even with the relative success of his latest offering, *The Good Thief* (2003), he is dismayed with the current climate of the industry, and claims to have temporarily abandoned filmmaking for novel-writing.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Autobiographical POV***

*My Left Foot* is unique and moves into a different terrain of adaptation because it is based on an autobiography. *The Butcher Boy* might be read as a semi-autobiographical text, sharing the writer's more malleable, dialectic relationship between past and present, with several other contemporary texts, such as *Reading in the Dark*, *Angela's Ashes*, and *Paddy Clarke Ha, Ha, Ha*. But Patrick McCabe's involvement in the adaptation of *The Butcher Boy* avoids the sort of criticism directed towards *My Left Foot* because of the possibility of misinterpreting a personal account in the author's absence. Instead, *My Left Foot* was scripted by the director and Shane Connaughton, a writer who later adapted his own novel, *The Run of the Country* (1995). The autobiographical nature of the project increases what is at stake in the filmmaker's interpretation. The film is not, as David Lavery has pointed out in his analysis, 'based on the "novel *My Left Foot* by Christy Brown"',<sup>16</sup> as the opening credits suggest. Although the screenplay does more accurately describe itself as 'based on Christy Brown's autobiography *My Left Foot*',<sup>17</sup> Lavery's criticism of the film focuses on the manner in which the film frames the narrative, giving the appearance it is recounting the book, when the material it recounts is inaccurate - a far cry from the book - and therefore misleading. The film begins after the book is published and Brown is attending a ceremony where he meets Mary (his future wife). The film opens depicting an older and

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<sup>15</sup> Sylvia Patterson, 'Interview with Neil Jordan', *Sunday Herald Magazine*, 2 March 2003, pp. 20-25: 25.

<sup>16</sup> David Lavery, 'The Strange Text of *My Left Foot*', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1993, pp. 194-199: 197.

more debauched Christy, ensuring from the start that any preconceptions about what a film about a disabled person should be like are destabilized. The text, by contrast, begins with a description of the illness and the moment Christy is first able to communicate with his left foot by scratching out the letter 'A' across the floor. Perhaps the film's beginning is more likely to have been drawn from Brown's later novel, *Down All the Days*. Although *Down All the Days* does not open with an older and wiser Christy, similarly, it undermines any preconceptions held by the reader by focusing on a formative moment, signalling a loss of innocence, when at a carnival he is hoisted up by a gang of friends in order to leer into a kinetoscope peepshow. Regardless, the film version, unlike either written text, begins by linking the narrative with Mary. Waiting in a room before his entrance to the ceremony, Brown encourages Mary to read his book (and keep reading throughout the film). This becomes a necessary function for the film's progression. The narrative is structured around Mary's mental picture rendering the events depicted in the book she is reading, and is occasionally suppressed to return to the film's present day, drawing Mary – the reader – as well as the spectator, outside that particular layer of the diegesis.

Lavery draws attention to the misreading of other critics of the technique as flashback and borrows Bruce Kawin's term 'mindscreen' instead, a term Kawin explores in his book on first-person narration and effective mediation between story and audience.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the narrative is not simply retelling past events as would be expected of the use of flashback. Instead, it is mediated through and motivated by Mary's reading and interpretation of the book, perhaps admitting the film's inevitable distance from the original autobiography by Christy Brown. Lavery makes this distinction in order to explain the film's employment of a device that suggests authenticity but delivers a text significantly altered from the original. Even passages read from the book in the film, Lavery notes, bear

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<sup>17</sup> Shane Connaughton and Jim Sheridan, *My Left Foot (screenplay)* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1989).

<sup>18</sup> Bruce Kawin, *Mindscreen: Bergman, Godard, and First-Person Film* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978).

scant resemblance to the published work. Lavery remarks upon how easily one could be led 'to believe that Mary Carr's copy of *My Left Foot* was the result of some Borgesian printing error and that the discrepancies [...] were just the result of her very odd copy'.<sup>19</sup> Lavery also suggests the transformation to be explained by the producers, one of whom was Brown's literary editor, taking liberties to draw from unpublished work or other instances in his life. Certainly, Pearson, a close friend of Brown's, admits he added a scene of a more personal nature, based around his first encounter with Brown in a pub. But Lavery's reaction signals an important crossover from fictional adaptations and autobiographical ones. Although Lavery does not doubt the authenticity of *My Left Foot* in terms of Brown's life, he criticises the film's appearance of being based on his book. Still, as with all adaptations, a didactic word for word rendering of the original source is not always the most faithful.

Many critics have noted the crucial distinction between film and literature in terms of showing rather than telling, but Shane Connaughton, who co-authored the screenplay of *My Left Foot*, insists the script should unfold 'like you're telling a child a bedtime story'.<sup>20</sup> What Connaughton implies is that particular details of the narrative are so well rehearsed, they have been honed to the clearest and most concise details. His comments in many ways reflect what Seymour Chatman regards as the key narrative structures of the novel or short story in relation to their adaptation to film. It is often expected that the plot of a film will not contain the complex and detailed plot of a novel. The film relates story information in depth and with great detail, through many methods. Sound, mise-en-scène, editing, and the framing of the camera all relay information to the spectator in a minimal amount of time that would prove an impossible task in written form. Although it is not always necessary, certain changes to the plot are to be expected. Even in the form of the

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<sup>19</sup> Lavery, 'The Strange Text of *My Left Foot*', p. 197.

<sup>20</sup> Elaine Lennon, 'Border Man', *Film Ireland*, February/March 1996, pp. 12-13: 12.



written biography or autobiography, the narrative structure is dramatically altered, and often liberties are taken with various aspects of the plot.

Like Connaughton, Jim Sheridan has also likened film to an act of storytelling. In the introduction to the published screenplay, he describes the medium as marked by a 'simplicity of form so that you can write in a naïve way as if the story has never been told before'.<sup>21</sup> This he further relates to '*seanchai* - Irish mythic tales with happy endings'.<sup>22</sup> This connection of film to Irish storytelling Sheridan relates to the 'Hollywood mogul' asking him to "'Tell me a story'".<sup>23</sup> This method, he argues, differs little from the way other storytelling has developed. He explains: 'surely that is the way the old fairy- and folk-tales developed: by repetition, seeing which bits worked, keeping them and polishing them'.<sup>24</sup> Sheridan's remarks could be interpreted as relegating the visual nature of cinema in order to promote his own filmmaking practices within an Irish oral tradition. But rather than simply downplaying the importance of the visual, the director seems to be arguing for the appropriateness of cinema as a form for exploring all types of Irish identity, providing an opportunity for even more traditional forms of storytelling to be re-enacted. As Sheridan shows here, the Hollywood film requires simplicity of plot, no matter what its subject matter. Similar to Vladimir Propp's understanding of the shared essential components of the fairytale, the process of adaptation also involves a simplification of plot, or a narrowing down of the cast of characters, choosing particular scenes for their filmic value, and most importantly bringing the internal thoughts and emotions of the written text into the external world of the film.<sup>25</sup> In terms of autobiography, the events of their life may in fact be what

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<sup>21</sup> Connaughton and Sheridan, *My Left Foot*, pp. vii-ix.

<sup>22</sup> Connaughton and Sheridan, *My Left Foot*, p. viii.

<sup>23</sup> Connaughton and Sheridan, *My Left Foot*, p. viii.

<sup>24</sup> Connaughton and Sheridan, *My Left Foot*, p. viii.

<sup>25</sup> Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1968). Peter Wollen, referring to Propp's hypothesis, developed a similar theory of signification in the cinema in his *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (London: Secker and Warburg [in association with the BFI], 1979).

Sheridan regards as the 'simplicity' of plot, rather than the author's articulation of those events. If the actual text of the autobiography is reduced to the bare-bones structure that Sheridan seems to call for, the author's rendition of those events (i.e. the actual autobiography) could prove extraneous to the filmmaking process.

Film is equally reliant on the 'articulation' rather than what is 'articulated' as a method of establishing itself. Boris Eikenbaum, in his 1926 study *Literature and the Cinema*, remarked that 'Plot in film ... is constructed not so much by the movement of the story line as by "stylistic" features.'<sup>26</sup> Especially in the case of autobiography, or biographies of figures of historical and political significance, such as Spike Lee's film of *Malcolm X* (1992), the alterations in the manner of the original narration, or sometimes even the 'actual' events, are likely to draw attention and perhaps criticism. In *Malcolm X* in particular, Spike Lee's authorial presence is made clear – most obviously from his physical appearances on screen, but also through the contemporary stylistic marks which aimed to draw a controversial leader in American history from the pages of politically slanted school history books to a reinterpretation in the present. In many ways, Malcolm X's articulation of his own life is framed by Spike Lee's articulation of the autobiography. Similarly, Sheridan's film based on another autobiography, this time by Gerry Conlon, *In the Name of the Father*, involves a reworking of Conlon's narrative. Certain alterations of the original, including some of the actual events, were regarded as necessary in the process of adaptation. One change criticised in particular was the representation of the father and son imprisoned in the same cell, something that only occurred temporarily and not for the majority of their incarceration. Although it might be criticised as failing to adapt *Brown's* story, the additions to the narrative of *My Left Foot*, from other works by Brown as well as other stories from those who knew him, is reflective of the process of constructing any biography or autobiography. By framing the narrative through his wife's interpretation of

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<sup>26</sup> Boris Eikenbaum, 'Literature and Cinema (1926)', in Stephen Bann and John Bowlt (eds.), *Russian Formalism* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973), pp. 122-127: 124.

his book, the film highlights the inability of memory or history to remain unaffected by future events. Even if Brown were to script the film himself, his recounting of the events would unavoidably alter. Just as the story changed in shape and form from the publication of *My Left Foot* to *Down All the Days*, the retelling of *My Left Foot* on screen would have no doubt presented a considerably different reflection.

In addition to his criticism of the actual story discourse, and its lack of grounding in the original, Lavery criticises scenes he describes as 'completely outside Brown's point of view'.<sup>27</sup> Pointing to one scene in particular in which Christy's father reacts to Christy's birth and erupts angrily in a pub, Lavery emphasises that such scenes only illustrate the lack of subjectivity given to Brown in what is supposedly an autobiographical film.

Although Lavery does recognise the occasional use of point-of-view shots throughout the film that are certainly suggestive of the subjective nature of the narrative, the alterations of the original narrative and the expression of other character's viewpoints determines his own interpretation of the film. Lavery's search for Brown's discrete 'point-of-view' fails to acknowledge the impossibility of such a task and the intertextual relations of all forms of autobiography, or even biography for that matter. In his essay 'On the Nature of Autobiography', James Olney describes autobiographies as 'intensely *intertextual*, and ... in several different senses', interfacing with other writers, their own works, and their own lives.<sup>28</sup>

With regard to point-of-view, it is important to note that often, even in the stylistic details of the original autobiography, the narrative may shift temporarily to focus on other characters. As Seamus Deane writes: 'Autobiography is not just concerned with the self; it is also concerned with the "other", the person or persons, events or places, that have helped

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<sup>27</sup>Lavery, 'The Strange Text of *My Left Foot*', p. 194.

<sup>28</sup> James Olney, 'On the Nature of Autobiography', in James Noonan (ed.), *Biography and Autobiography: Essays on Irish and Canadian History and Literature* (Ottawa, Ontario: Carleton University Press, 1993), pp. 109-121.

to give the self definition.<sup>129</sup> The importance of representing Christy Brown's own community is apparent in *My Left Foot*, but is even more clearly a matter of great significance to the writer in his follow-up novel, *Down all the Days*. In many ways, this process could be read as Brown's tribute to those around him and a personal struggle to view himself within his community rather than solely from the outside. Deane speaks of the dilemma faced by the autobiographer as a 'struggle between the sense of the "other" and the wish to find a way of including the other in some unified version both of self and culture ... one of the motive forces behind most of the writings here [Ireland].<sup>130</sup> In fact, it is a device characteristic of the form in which narrators mediate stories passed down by their families.

Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* begins the story before its author is even born and sometimes, even explicitly, the author explains his own knowledge of events preceding his birth as a story passed down by his mother. As the book's title suggests, it is as much about Angela, his mother, as it is about himself. Similarly, Roddy Doyle's *A Star Called Henry* is a fictional narrative, but is written as autobiography, from the point-of-view of the central character who is able to recount the events leading up to his birth. In a similar way, a large focus of Christy's narrative is on his mother, with one chapter literally bearing the title 'M-O-T-H-E-R', representing Christy's achievement in spelling out the word on the floor in chalk with his foot.

Christy Brown's book opens with a description of his birth. From the outset, he explains 'Mine was a difficult birth, I am told. Both mother and son almost died' (p. 9). This style of narration continues, as Christy Brown recounts his family's discovery of his condition. In an almost improbably detailed insight into his mother's own experiences with him as a baby, the narrative explains how every doctor his mother took him to see said he was 'a

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<sup>29</sup> Seamus Deane, 'Autobiography and Memoirs 1890-1988: Introduction', *The Field Day Anthology*, pp. 380-383: 380.

<sup>30</sup> Deane, 'Autobiography and Memoirs 1890-1988', p. 382.

very interesting but also a hopeless case. Many told mother very gently that I was mentally defective and would remain so. That was a hard blow to a young mother who had already reared five healthy children' (p. 10). Similarly, in Doyle's novel, Henry describes the force of his own birth in mythic terms: 'Henry Smart the Second or Third came charging into the world on a river of water and blood that washed the news off the papers' (p. 23). Brown, like McCourt and Doyle, eventually reveals his source of detailed subjective knowledge to be his mother. Brown writes, 'Mother tells me how one day she had been sitting with me for hours in an upstairs room, showing me pictures out of a great big storybook that I had got from Santa Claus...' (p. 12). As might be implied from the book's opening passages, Christy's source of knowledge is his mother.

Christy's knowledge of events he would not be able to recall, most obviously those that occurred before he was born, does not become a problematic feature of the narrative. Instead, as in the film, it has very much to do with the way Christy perceives himself, or anticipates how others must perceive him. He explains himself in infancy as 'convulsed with movement, wild, stiff, snake-like movement that never left me, except in sleep. My fingers twisted and twitched continually, my arms twined backwards and would often shoot out suddenly this way and that, and my head lolled and sagged sideways. I was a queer, crooked little fellow' (p. 12). The detailed description of Christy as a young child also questions the source of his description. Perhaps what is the more likely to be the drive Deane speaks of, for the autobiographer to amalgamate self with Other, is ultimately revealed as the desire to unify the experiences of the self with the Mother. In this sense, the importance of identification is read in a nostalgic light where women in general, and the mother in particular, are framed within a nationalist discourse.

Towards the end of the book, Christy's experience at a clinic suggests his own description may be mirrored in his poignant realisations. Here he notes the

near-horror in the form of twisting, twining babies with crooked little limbs, misshapen heads, distorted features...convulsed with wild endless

movement...their little hands clenched, their legs bent and locked together...their heads awry. Suddenly I realised for the first time what I myself had looked like as a child. (p. 30)

As this passage demonstrates, much of Christy's narrative is heavily dependent on his own subjective interpretation of past events, based on his experiences. He sees himself in the children at the clinic and is able to imagine the detail of himself as a child in order to fill in the gaps missing from the stories his mother has passed on to him. In this sense, the film's addition of the father's experience after Christy's birth does not discount the autobiographical nature but presents an event that was more than likely to have existed within the periphery of Christy's knowledge, representing what was discussed around him under the assumption that he would not understand.

What seems to be Lavery's largest complaint about the film are the alterations in the story from the original. Fiona Shaw's character, for instance, represents an amalgamation of several people from Brown's autobiography. As with adaptations of fiction, the film must simplify plot, characters and narration, often dramatically heightening certain scenes for greater impact. The narration cannot build gradually, cumulatively, as is the case in its written form. So in the film version of Brown's autobiography, his first word sketched on the floor is 'Mother'. In the book this is something he eventually does, but it is certainly not the first word. His mother teaches him how to spell and then Christy, on his own, writes out 'mother'.

It is impossible for the film version of Christy Brown's autobiography to remain solely Christy Brown's story. The film originates within the form of autobiography but then interprets the material through many different people - Pearson, Sheridan, and also Daniel Day Lewis' well-researched portrayal of Brown. But the film importantly begins from Christy's perspective. The device of framing the past narrative with the benefit Christy is asked to make an appearance at after the book has been published, confirms for us - if we didn't already know - Christy's own acceptance of himself and later success. This

knowledge the reader experiences when reading the book. The very fact that the book is there, having been written and successfully published ensures some sort of partial coming to terms and calls for a celebration over Christy's eventual achievement of the ability to communicate with others (in person and in print). One reviewer of *Angela's Ashes* criticised the absence of this sort of 'omniscient' narration and the subsequent loss of satisfaction for the reader in the film version (another reviewer claimed the musical score took the place of narrator in *Angela's Ashes*).<sup>31</sup> In reading the book, much of the dark and traumatic passages are framed in the mind of the reader with the understanding that the person lived through the events to pen the words they are reading. This particular reviewer complained that the film does not offer such a framing, and you are not given the sense that there is such a guaranteed future for the characters of the film. One might imagine a narrative more akin to Kirsten Sheridan's *Disco Pigs*, which opens with central character narrating her own birth and employs voice-over throughout, achieving the effect of at least lessening the degree of uncertainty felt towards the fate of the protagonist. Brian McFarlane, in his review of *My Left Foot*, located a similar dissatisfaction with the 'uncertainty' of Jim Sheridan's film. McFarlane suggests that even the structure 'depends on our knowledge of this achievement. Its interest will not, therefore, lie in creating the suspense of will-he-or-won't-he-make-it?'<sup>32</sup>

In the book, Christy himself explains how later knowledge affects one's reflections of the past. After he returns from Lourdes, a doctor visits him and suggests new treatment that may lead to a cure. The whole family, including Christy are ecstatic with the news.

Christy explains:

In a very few words he had changed the pattern of my whole life; he had given the past some significance and the future some promise, some definite purpose; he had given me something to live for, work for and fight for at the moment

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<sup>31</sup> Susan Tetlow Harrington, 'Angela's Ashes', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2001, pp. 58-61.

<sup>32</sup> Brian McFarlane, 'My Left Foot', *Cinema Papers*, no. 77, January 1990, pp. 61-66.

when I was sure that there was nothing but empty and fruitless years before me. (p. 107)

In this 'Hollywood' moment, Brown is blissfully aware of his own narrative's happy ending. To a similar extent, from the beginning of the film, the spectator is reassured by the knowledge of Brown's future successes that 'everything will be okay'. But rather than view this as the Hollywood generic restructuring of Christy Brown's autobiography, perhaps it could belie other influences. Instead of referring to it as strictly an offspring of Hollywood cinema, Richard Dyer roots the film in another set of practices - possibly evident in European cinema, but more clearly aligned with a British industry - by referring to it as a 'heritage film'.<sup>33</sup> By no means a typical heritage film, it undoubtedly shares certain stylistic features, and perhaps even similar cultural/political objectives.

The concept of heritage suggests something that is worthy of being inherited or passed on, and generally embodies the values (often conservative) of a 'nation'. Lance Pettitt, in his study of Irish cinema, explains that 'the dominant kind of films in Ireland in the late 1980s and early 1990s have been collectively classified as heritage cinema, adapting the term used to describe the period-set British films of the 1980s that celebrated Englishness as epitomised by Merchant-Ivory'.<sup>34</sup> He also adopts Ruth Barton's distinction which classifies Irish heritage as set in the 1950s or earlier. It is this reference to the past that affords a 'distanced scenario' which culturally precedes 1960s modernisation. For Pettitt, these narratives embody a longing for the past or childhood and often have literary or theatrical sources. What these interpretations seem to warn of is, firstly, that a concern with the past more than likely involves a regressive move, possibly signalling conservative political objectives, and secondly, that the literary is inextricably bound to this agenda. Pettitt's classification of literary adaptation within heritage cinema which he posits in direct

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<sup>33</sup> Richard Dyer, 'Heritage Cinema in Europe', in Caughie and Rockett, *Companion to British and Irish Cinema*, pp. 186-187.

<sup>34</sup> Pettitt, *Screening Ireland*, p. 115.



contrast to the 'original' screenplay, suggests that no matter how innovative, the adaptation is essentially nostalgic.

Many of the narratives discussed throughout this thesis, emanating from Scotland as well as Ireland, risk falling under such a limiting and constrictive framework, whether it is warranted or not. The danger of these problematic readings is that rather than engaging with the new texts themselves they merely impose rereadings of British cinema. By contrast, a film such as *The Butcher Boy* – with its foundations in the literary, and rooted in the past - resists such categorisation and works to debunk such assumptions surrounding heritage, the past, literature, and representation. It is in this respect that McLoone's priorities for an 'emerging National Cinema' and his insistence upon looking 'inwards and backwards' at Ireland's history in addition to looking 'outwards and forwards to its European future' seem doubly important in their acknowledgement of the pressing nature of the past, too often avoided or overlooked.

## **SECTION TWO: Scottish Literature to Film**

# 1. Christopher Rush: *Venus Peter*

## *A Twelvemonth in 1hr: 34mins*

Co-scripted by the original text's author, Christopher Rush, and the film's director, Ian Sellar, *Venus Peter* (1990) tells the story of a young boy growing up in a small Scottish fishing village in the 1940s and 50s. Shot over seven weeks on location in the village of Stromness in Orkney, the film was commended for its wise budgeting strategies. Scottish film critic Colin McArthur, in his article 'In Praise of a Poor Cinema', argues the necessity for rethinking the approach to cinema in Scotland from an industrial standpoint to one which considers it from the viewpoint of 'cultural need'.<sup>1</sup> Like Martin McLoone's explorations of the 'Third Cinema' which values its independence from outside commercial influences, McArthur - who coincidentally refers to Scotland as 'on the film-making front, a third world country' - emphasizes the cultural significance of filming on a small budget, praising the production of *Venus Peter*.<sup>2</sup> Sellar's film was funded by piecing together various sources rather than relying on a larger Hollywood company as its primary means of support, and in this regard it is typical of a strand of cinema explored in this thesis.

In a creative funding manoeuvre, the film's producer, Chris Young, who had previously been working from the sidelines in other Scottish films such as *Another Time, Another Place* (Michael Radford, 1983), *Comfort and Joy*, and *The Girl in the Picture* (Cary Parker, 1986), enlisted the support of friends by asking them to invest fifty pounds in order to commission Rush to write the script, on the understanding that if the film was made they would be given eighty pounds in return on the first day of shooting. Young, who also went

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<sup>1</sup> Colin McArthur, 'In Praise of a Poor Cinema', *Sight and Sound*, August 1993, pp. 30-32.

<sup>2</sup> Similar to Luke Gibbons' and several others' association of Ireland with the concept of 'Third World', Willy Maley in his article 'Denizens, Citizens, Tourists, and Others: Marginality and Mobility in the Writings of James Kelman and Irvine Welsh', in David Bell and Azzedine Haddour (eds.), *City Visions* (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 2000), pp. 60-72, describes Glasgow as embodying several worlds – the 'Union and Empire; the world of socialist activism; and the world of cultural

on to employ the same tactic for his next film *Prague* (Ian Sellar, 1992) borrowed the idea from Spike Lee's account of making *She's Gotta Have It* (1986).<sup>3</sup> After this first initiative, the script attracted funding from the Scottish Film Council which afforded the opportunity to secure the involvement of Sellar, a graduate of the National Film and Television School, fresh from the experience of working on several other Scottish films including two by Bill Douglas, *My Ain Folk* (1973) and *My Childhood* (1972). Sellar had also enjoyed success with a screenplay he wrote in his first year of film school called *Over Germany*, picked up by Channel 4 and ZDF.<sup>4</sup>

The timing was right. At that point, several cinematic features focusing on Scotland were under development at the British Film Institute. Young, the film's producer, explained: 'people have suggested to me that there's a prejudice against Scottish subjects, but on the basis of my experience, I have to disagree with that'.<sup>5</sup> Colin MacCabe, the director of the BFI at the time (and also a Professor of English Studies at Strathclyde University from 1981-1985 and co-founder of the John Logie Baird Institute in Glasgow) would eventually serve as the executive producer for *Venus Peter*. In addition to *Venus Peter*, the BFI also had a hand in other 'Scottish' features, including one adaptation for television, *Play Me Something*, an adaptation of a short story by John Berger filmed in Venice and the Hebrides.<sup>6</sup> Other 'Scottish' projects commissioned by the BFI around the time were *Silent Screams* (David Hayman, 1990) and *Blue Black Permanent* (Margaret Tait, 1993).<sup>7</sup>

Although it seems evident that the production sector of the company was a prime site for

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consumerism', but also a 'Third World' referring 'to economic status rather than geographical space' (p. 60).

<sup>3</sup> Carolyn Hooper, 'Art of the Deal: British Screen, Scottish/Irish/European Money', *Screen International*, vol. 869, no. 7, August, 1992, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Nicolas Kent, '*Venus Peter*', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 58, no. 2, 1989, pp. 113-116: 113.

<sup>5</sup> Julian Petley, 'No Comfort, More Joy', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 56, no. 671, 1989, pp. 356-357: 357.

<sup>6</sup> 'BFI Announces Three Theatrical Features', *Screen International*, vol. 666, no. 20, August 1988, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> For more on these see Duncan Petrie's, *Screening Scotland*.

developing Scottish films, the film's producer claimed that 'it wasn't until Bill Gavin of the now-defunct Gavin Films came on board and Ray McNally was cast that others (notably the BFI) took serious interest'.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, it took the involvement of the highly regarded Irish actor and the New Zealand born producer who was at the time best known for his contributions to *Sid and Nancy* (Alex Cox, 1986), *Belly of an Architect* (Peter Greenaway, 1987), and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (Stephen Frears, 1987), to secure the deal with the BFI. Funding was also sourced from the Orkney Islands Council who held a reserve of funds in order to develop various aspects of the community in anticipation of the loss of the area's profitable oil industry. Additional funds were also received from Channel 4, British Screen, and the Scottish Film Production Fund.

Some of the initial uncertainty surrounding financial backing may have had more to do with the difficulty of adapting Christopher Rush's *A Twelvemonth and a Day*, the eloquent, semi-autobiographical account of the Fife-born author of several collections of poetry and short stories. In *Twelvemonth and a Day*, Rush enriches the text with his own poetry and trades elaborate plots for a dedicated focus on the characters – a style that one would generally associate with the character-driven short story.<sup>9</sup> The book is described on its cover as 'a fusion of autobiography, family tradition and social documentary' and was referred to by one critic as 'an anthology of memories and images from Rush's childhood'.<sup>10</sup> These comments could also be applied to other autobiographical 'fictions', including several mentioned in this study, such as Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, Christy Brown's *My Left Foot*, or Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* – or even Doyle's *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* and Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*. But the 'anthology' sketched by Rush differs from these in its unconventional approach to narrative, which prioritises the depiction of several characters within a community rather than the linear progression

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<sup>8</sup> Carolyn Hooper, 'Art of the Deal', p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Rush, *A Twelvemonth and a Day* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1985). All further references will be to this edition.

familiar to the child's coming-of-age narrative. This distinction is perhaps what may have had alarm bells ringing at the thought of attempting to relocate the text within the conventional narrative of film. Films based on McCourt's or Brown's autobiographies (or, as is speculated, Deane's in the near future) translate the texts easily to film. Adapting Rush's fiction, as the critic's comments suggest, bears more similarities to the attempt to adapt an anthology of short stories or poems. The narrative consists of sketch-like portraits of various members of the community. It bears very little likeness to the structure of a conventional film script. Unlike other writers who have had their fiction adapted, Rush cannot be said to have been influenced to any degree by his exposure to film. In fact, he admits that at the time he had not seen a film in fifteen years.<sup>11</sup>

*Raising the dead/re-living the text*

O who sits weeping on my grave  
And will not let me sleep?

*A Twelvemonth and a Day* (epigraph)

As the extract from part of the poem which opens Rush's novel suggests, the 'anthology' of lives depicted throughout the two-hundred and sixty-five pages aims to revive those from his past. This purpose is illustrated vividly in one passage recalling the ritual of Peter's Aunt Leebie on All Souls Day, as she leaves food and drink out for the dead, and serves as Peter's 'dark deity of the hearth, filling my head with the wild old wine of her tales and ballads' (p. 212). In addition to remembering the lives of the deceased, she educates him on the community's cultural past by reciting 'old Scots folk poetry'. Witchlike, she conjures up the dead, illuminating them through her descriptive tales in front of the fire for Peter to see for himself. The dead (whether real or part of the fictional imagination of the community) are never allowed to rest. Rush writes:

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<sup>10</sup> Kent, 'Venus Peter', p. 113.

<sup>11</sup> Dick, *From Limelight to Satellite*, p. 116.

In the white amphitheatre of her skull sailor-lads and lords were levelled by the neutral sea, where they foundered together with all their fancy gear and frenzy for life. And she held in her cupped hands the howls of women inside castle-walls and girls tearing gold combs from their hair. (p. 215)

Here Leebie animates the invisible. Almost a metaphor for the process involved in adapting Rush's fiction, Leebie re-enacts the narratives, animating the inanimate.

*A Twelvemonth and a Day* has without doubt enjoyed more than one life. It has even resurfaced as a children's novel by the author titled *Venus Peter Saves the Whale*.

Nevertheless, it is not certain Rush is entirely comfortable with his text taking on a life of its own. In his article in Eddie Dick's *From Limelight to Satellite*, Rush describes the experience of turning his fiction into film as tinged with regret. He remarks that while the original script was six to seven hours long, the director's re-write required that 'the human characters were cut down like corn'.<sup>12</sup> In this regard, the rebirth of the text entails a loss. The wide range of characters was necessarily scaled back. Adaptation often requires not only the obliteration of particular narrative elements, but also their alteration. Rush has expressed displeasure with the various changes made to his original text, particularly the rather optimistic ending of the film that leaves us with Peter smiling.<sup>13</sup> Rather than Rush's unmistakably glum musings on the fading of a way of life reliant on the fishing industry (read as a general nostalgic mourning for a 'lost' Scotland), the film offers a more hopeful reading.

The intriguing structure of Rush's novel, as the title suggests, progresses through chapters divided into the months of the year, ending with the chapter 'and a day', providing a cyclical presentation of Peter's childhood. However, the unique structuring device posed difficulties for its translation into the new medium, relying heavily on structures of its own. For a start, because of the limitations of employing one actor to play out Peter's entire

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<sup>12</sup> Christopher Rush, 'Venus Peter: from pictures to Pictures' in Dick (ed.) *From Limelight to Satellite*, pp 115-132: 122.

<sup>13</sup> Rush, 'Venus Peter', p. 132.

childhood, the 'coming-of-age' narrative is condensed into a much shorter period. Much of the novel, stretched over a period of years, is required to be condensed and unified. One way of doing this is by condensing characters. For example, many of the female characters depicted in Rush's novel merge into the mysterious character, Princess Paloma. This is not to say that the film does not ultimately retain the story's projection of an 'anthology of characters'. Several of the many characters present in the novel make appearances in the film, lurking in the background, perhaps only discernable to those who have read the book.

Ultimately, the difficulty in adapting a largely character-driven narrative did not deter the filmmakers. Chris Young, the film's producer, explained: 'It wasn't obviously a film subject because there was no storyline but it was full of interesting images and I was attracted by the idea of making a film that wasn't based on social realism but on something as mythical as the sea.'<sup>14</sup> Young seems unconcerned with the absence of a conventional narrative structure, and fairly confident of the possibility of a film comprised solely of narrative 'impressions'. The 'images' Young refers to here present themselves in the text through the detailed fashion in which Rush explores the changing of the seasons and invokes enigmatic qualities in even the most ordinary flora and fauna. Through this technique, Rush blurs boundaries between the practical or everyday and what might be called superstition, carefully setting the tone for the fairy-tale styled narration. Although Ian Sellar admits the style of the book is far from cinematic, he claims it presented

an exciting challenge because there was nothing obvious in a filmic sense about the book, which is really a series of personal recollections. Because there was no storyline it was a matter of finding one from within the material and from speaking to Chris. In the end it's not so much faithful to the book as to something that's within the book, an atmosphere, a particular kind of imagination.<sup>15</sup>

Elsewhere, Sellar has elaborated further:

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<sup>14</sup> Kent, '*Venus Peter*', p. 113.

<sup>15</sup> Kent, '*Venus Peter*', p. 116.



I liked the challenge of taking on something that, in a way, seemed impossible. The book is very much a series of incidents, memories of different people of different generations. The film would obviously have to depend on more than a storyline to push it forward. I liked picking through what was there to find the soul of the book, which would be the soul of the film as well. It took seven or so drafts to get it right, to find a way of driving it forward without a story, through the way in which the elements are put together. With a story you don't need that much detail to keep it moving, whereas you have to pack something like this very full of information to keep enough life in each scene.<sup>16</sup>

The producer and director's approach to the text as a creative source from which to draw an abundance of material, alleviated the potential difficulties of adapting Rush's unconventional book. Nevertheless, the elusive nature of what Young and Sellar posit as central to the text's meaning (i.e. 'images', 'atmosphere', or 'the book's soul') does not seem to render the task of adaptation any easier.

### *The poeticism of the 'real'*

Although Rush was not entirely uncritical, certain changes in the narrative he has spoken of approvingly. He admits that where *Venus Peter* perhaps succeeds more emphatically than *Twelvemonth* is in its presentation of two distinct levels of experience: the realistic and the poetic.<sup>17</sup> Arguing that a new balance is struck between the subjective and objective elements in its filmic counterpart, Rush explains: *Twelvemonth* is wholly submerged in its own poetry. *Venus Peter*, on the other hand, shows a boy of heightened sensibilities experiencing poetic fantasies, while all around him is a world of hard economic fact, a world falling apart financially.<sup>18</sup> If we recall Young's remark that it was precisely the *lack* of social realism that initially attracted him to the project, it might seem odd that the film's heightened sense of social realism is what Rush finds attractive. Even if the film does not serve as the escape route from realism that the producer intended, the resulting film's development of the realist context of Rush's 'poetry' doubtlessly succeeds.

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<sup>16</sup> Petley, 'No Comfort, More Joy', p. 357.

<sup>17</sup> Rush, *Venus Peter*, p. 127.

<sup>18</sup> Rush, *Venus Peter*, p. 128.

Rush's comments on the film's finely tuned realism might suggest a loss of the poetic in exchange for the 'real'. However, as Rush admits, the film's marked contrast between the boy's fantasy and the brutal realities surrounding him only further emphasises the elements of fantasy. Still, within the fantasy of Rush's book, hard-hitting realities surrounding Peter are revealed, in crucial moments, through the cracks in the young boy's fantasy world. Although the written form of the narrative does not include such unforgiving turns as the film's narrative alteration which forces Peter to come to terms with his Grandfather having his boat repossessed, Rush's book is not entirely devoid of harsh truths. The book may generate much of its fantasy-like narration through the vivid, imaginative musings of a young boy. But as the narration reflects in the novel's closing pages: 'Childhood was a dream. With both eyes now open and the cold light of understanding flooding in, I can see again how much of this was pure and simple observation, with now and then a little calculation' (p. 243-4). What Rush is intent on clarifying here is that the tendency to reduce the narration of a child to out-and-out fantasy is a mistake, and that often, even if a child might contort the facts with 'a little calculation', the 'fantasy' turns out to be what really happened. Like Francie Brady's imaginative musings, Peter's 'fantasy' is ultimately based on the honest observations of his reality.

The narration qualifies his re-examination of his childhood understanding of reality by adding that his 'grandfather had no time for the superficial sorts of superstitions with which the town was riddled' (p. 244). Here, it is the rest of town that exists in fantasy. In this light, his Grandson (similar to Francie Brady) could only be accused of merely observing the 'superstitions' from an outside vantage point. Through her lesson in literary interpretation, his well-liked teacher could also be said to have a hand in Peter's understanding of reality. In a poignant scene in Sellar's film, Peter is actively encouraged by his favourite teacher to 'see more'. In this scene, after he impresses her with his impeccable recitation of Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott* entirely from memory, the teacher asks if he 'understood' the poem. After he replies in the negative, the teacher explains to

Peter that in order to 'find beauty, you must never see what you see, you must always see more'. In this affecting moment, what the teacher encourages is almost an active imagining of reality, or a 'hyperreality' in which the truth is garnered from various sources other than what is readily presented.

Although at times he seems to imbue his surroundings with his own interpretation of events, fantasy or not, there are moments when the line between these musings and reality is clearly drawn. For example, Peter frequently reflects on the figure of the Princess of Tahiti, a much-talked about mysterious 'foreign' wife who keeps to herself, even though she plays virtually no role at all in the actual events of the narrative. Although Peter imagines what a Princess from such an 'exotic' location must certainly be like, he ultimately sees through the mystery the community shrouds her in. When he finally sees the Princess towards the narrative's close, she is seated on a bench, overweight, and middle-aged. Both film and novel may be seen to be balancing a degree of fantasy with the honest depiction of the difficulties facing a young boy coming of age. Both, to a certain degree, succeed in resurrecting the memories of Christopher Rush's boyhood, alongside the many other characters embedded in the history of his community. Like Aunt Leebie, who uncannily reanimates the past, ghostlike in front of the flames of the fire, the film succeeds in bringing the many stories to life within the flicker of its frames.

### ***Celtic myth, memory and nostalgia***

Roderick Watson, discussing the 'Celtic Twilight' and the general lament and nostalgia for the past, points to the preface to Christopher Rush's *Twelvemonth and a Day* as an example of what he sees as 'haunting' the literature of the day. This he describes as: 'Celtic projections of another place, "the shadowy Land of Heart's Desire", replete with everything that has somehow "gone away from the world"'.<sup>19</sup> Rush's lamentation of the final days of a successful, self-sustaining fishing industry, told through the eyes of a child also mourning

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<sup>19</sup> Watson, 'Maps of Desire', p. 288.

the loss of his youth as he reaches towards adulthood - good or bad - certainly bears similarities to several other narratives in Scottish literature (and also film). Where both book and film are concerned, it is important to examine their portrayal of certain elements of myth in Scottish culture. Set in the late 1940s and 50s the book begins as an exercise in looking at the past, and evokes varying degrees of nostalgia. The film, likewise, follows suit and sets the narrative in a Scottish historical past, expressing its own form of nostalgia not altogether unknown to Scottish representations on screen. Perhaps, going by Pettitt's notion of heritage presented in the previous discussion on *My Left Foot*, these factors surrounding the film (i.e. it is literary adaptation, set in the past) form a set of clues which point to an inevitable regressive representation. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the filmmakers 'were determined that their film would break with traditional ways of representing Scotland'.<sup>20</sup> Having worked previously on films with Scotland as their subject matter, they were disenchanted with previous representations and aimed to distinguish their own style of filmmaking accordingly.

One of the most intriguing questions to surface when considering the film and book versions of Rush's narrative and the attempt at 're-imagining' the Scottish past is: Whose fantasy is this? On the page is it Rush's? Is it personal or is it collective? On screen is it Rush's? Is it Sellar's or Young's? Or is it some sort of cultural 'symptom' invariably popping up in various artistic endeavours focusing on some aspect of Scottish culture?

One reviewer argued that 'What makes the film special is that it holds on to an innocence and optimism, as well as a seasoning of gentle humour, while steering clear of any shred of sentimentality.'<sup>21</sup> Paradoxically, this review praises the film for the very characteristic which makes Roderick Watson criticise the novel (i.e. falling into the over-romantic trappings of nostalgia). Philip Strick also sees the film profit from its departure from the novel. Strick believes the film to have 'taken on board an assortment of incidents and

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<sup>20</sup> Petley, 'No Comfort, More Joy', p. 357.

<sup>21</sup> Kate Bull, 'Reviews: *Venus Peter*', *Screen International*, vol. 733, no. 2, December 1989, p. 16.

characters and headed for intriguingly more temperate waters'.<sup>22</sup> The text he sees the film as moderating Strick describes as 'Rush's lament, a grim torrent of anecdotes, ballads, biblical allusions, and lyrical wordplay'. Strick's critique gets 'grim' itself, particularly when dealing with the final chapters of Rush's book, characterized 'by fathomless melancholy of the "What's to become of us all?" variety'. In some ways, this 'fathomless melancholy' ties the narrative to other Scottish narratives linked with the sort of realism Strick implies is absent. Ironically, it is with this approach that Rush's prose most resembles the brutal perspective of Grierson's films, determined in their catalogue of cultural memory. However, it is not simply Rush's recollection of cultural memory that Strick calls into question. Strick takes issue with the degree of intervention with which the narrative is delivered and praises the film's neutral tone. For Strick, 'where Rush as writer is inclined to preach, his tone on screen has become distinctly conciliatory'.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, this sort of tempering effect of the film does not always involve losses which Strick deems welcome. Strick admits: 'What was the very precise predicament of the village of St. Monans (on the Fife coast just north of Edinburgh) has become gently fictionalised into a more general experience.'<sup>24</sup> The film then undergoes an eroding of the local specificity of the narrative, a common occurrence in the process of adapting literature to film. Lynne Ramsay's adaptation of Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar* (2002), explored in detail later in this study, similarly loses a degree of local specificity in its rendering of the Oban port as a rather more ambiguous setting. Rush's novel, set in Fife, was filmed in Orkney because of the filmmakers' belief that the present-day Fife no longer looked the part of the rural community that Rush depicts in his novel.

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<sup>22</sup> Philip Strick, 'Feature Films: *Venus Peter*', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 56, no. 671, 1989, pp. 355-357: 355.

<sup>23</sup> Strick, 'Feature Films: *Venus Peter*', p. 355.

<sup>24</sup> Strick, 'Feature Films: *Venus Peter*', p. 355.

Regardless of the losses in narrative detail, Strick's overall distress with Rush's tone leads him to conclude that 'this sea-change has becalmed Rush's philosophy. His book shudders with the contemplation of death, devoting long passages to the reciting of epitaphs and to meditation on the innumerable bereavements they signify, while the film has all the hopes and promises of a voyage just begun in a life with many more discoveries ahead.'<sup>25</sup>

Without a doubt, the film imbues the book's pessimistic portrait of Rush's childhood with a hopeful optimism for the future. This is perhaps indicative of Rush's disappointment in an ending which leaves Peter with a smile on his face. The feelings of loss at the end of a particular culture and lifestyle are missing. Or, as Strick approvingly describes the alteration: 'Where the book sifts sadly through the wreckage of the past, the film derives its buoyancy from the portents studied and the wisdom gained; the prevailing current is of a defiant optimism. Much of this vitality comes quite simply from the look of the piece.'<sup>26</sup> In the end, it is the effect of the film's portrayal of Peter's life that Strick believes infuses the narrative with some semblance of hope.

Strick, for example, unsatisfied with Rush's lightly touching on Peter's relationship with his father in favour of concentrating on Peter's relationship with his grandfather, praises the film for restoring the importance of this relationship (or lack of it) by not only introducing the father as a character towards the end of the film, but through the fantasy Peter has of his father as a sailor. In sequences depicting his father, Peter often sees him through the lens of a telescope given to him by his grandfather, in a glorious light amidst streamers and blowing masts. As if by magic, the telescope allows him to, as his teacher instructs, 'see more'. The telescope magnifies his view in a similar way that Strick sees the film as 'seeing more' than the text would seem to allow. When he does meet with his father, the experience is far from dream-like. Still, this fantasy is not entirely in the imagination of

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<sup>25</sup> Strick, 'Feature Films: *Venus Peter*', p.355.

<sup>26</sup> Strick, 'Feature Films: *Venus Peter*', p. 355.

the filmmakers. It was Peter, in the book, who dreams the fantastic scene in which his father would make his return:

His ship came swaying drunkenly over the morning horizon, sending the low sun spinning into space. It sliced the May Island in two and sank the Bass Rock, which went growling to the bottom of the sea. Then it crashed through our small harbour and kept on coming, right up the brae, battle-scarred and glorious, until the point of its prow splintered our window panes, there was my father straddling the bowsprit with bell-bottomed trousers and waving madly to me from on high as I lay back on my bed in amazement. (p. 42)

In a return whose scale might be said to be in proportion with that of *The Odyssey*, Peter dreams of the disruptive but magnificent homecoming of his father. It is hardly the yearning fantasy Strick feels the narrative realistically requires, but it is fantasy nonetheless, if not as pleasing to the reader. It is Peter's dream, whereas the film posits the fantasy in the imagination of Peter through his mother's bedtime story, imaginatively telling him of his father's heroic return and the way in which, as in the book, he would crash through the harbour and up the braes. Thus the fantasy appears to be the growth of a seed planted by his mother at the beginning of the film and accordingly does not seem to represent Peter's fantasy, but his mother's. The film, rather than rely on the narration of the boy, depends upon the mother's narration. Similar to Christy Brown's wife's 'mindscreen' through which we receive the story in *My Left Foot*, Peter's mother becomes, in this moment, a proxy narrator, framing Peter's story.

### ***Celtic mythologies: Rush and other Scottish writers***

In his essay, 'Maps of Desire: Scottish Literature in the Twentieth Century', Roderick Watson examines the existence of myth within the writing of various modern Scottish writers. Arguing the necessity to approach these texts with caution, he warns that 'this "other-worldly" spirituality of the Gael, so central to the Celtic Revival and so attractive as a counterbalance to the alienation of industrial capitalism, could be applied with equal conviction to programmes of either pluralism or unification, to further the ends, in other

words of either international socialism or fascism'.<sup>27</sup> Certainly, the Celtic Revival has been similarly criticized for a tendency to valorise cultural exclusivity over cultural plurality. Often we have seen the resulting adoption by other causes to suit their own agendas. An example of this would be the interest expressed by Pat Robertson in promoting a sort of Southern American Celtic Revival as a roundabout way of expressing white supremacy. This sort of appropriation may help to explain Strick's criticism of the nostalgic 'lament' aspect of Rush's narrative and his approval of a more forward-looking, upbeat approach. Nevertheless, Watson's focus on the "'other-worldly" spirituality of the Gael' poses a few problems. He links this type of representation to writers such as Muir, MacDiarmid, and Mackay Brown, but also, ultimately, to Christopher Rush.<sup>28</sup>

The connections between the approaches of Mackay Brown and Rush cannot be ignored.

The editors of *Scottish Literature* remark that:

Christopher Rush gives a poetic and elegiac account of Fife's sea-coast and fishing tradition, together with a profound sense of loss. Without Mackay Brown's mixture of religious and traditional belief to sustain him, he shares Brown's antipathy to material 'progress', and shares also Brown's clear and vivid imagery and poetic rhythm. *A Twelvemonth and a Day* (1985) is, if anything, even keener than Brown in its lament for his lost community, and closer to Brown in its structure - each month is a chapter, with a sustaining patterning of natural seasons in which the human stories are embedded. The difference lies in Rush's brave, if not entirely successful, attempt to embed these powerful stories in a background of English literature.<sup>29</sup>

This interpretation suggests that what Watson categorizes as Rush's 'other-worldly' mythological representations is something far more complex. Rush does not always embed the fantasies of the boy and the mythologies of the island in a history of Scottish literature and folklore. Although there are instances where Scottish ballads are recalled (such as the passage with Aunt Leebie), Peter's God, he tells us, is Shakespeare. Even

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<sup>27</sup> Watson, 'Maps of Desire', p. 292.

<sup>28</sup> Watson, 'Maps of Desire', pp. 285-305.

<sup>29</sup> Gifford, Dunnigan, and MacGillivray, *Scottish Literature*, p. 838.



Rush's title, *A Twelve Month and a Day*, has its origins in Katherine's line in Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* (act V, sc ii, ln 1019).

***Venus Peter and the purple heather-coloured lenses of Scottish filmmaking***

Although Rush's text may be clearly situated within a Scottish literary tradition, it hardly comes as a surprise that the film has proven much more difficult to place. It seems often the case that when an indigenous Scottish film production is successful, it is confirmed to be part of a European Art Cinema movement outside Scottish filmmaking. Perhaps because what has been seen as a characteristic of the murky waters of what is defined as 'Scottish National Cinema' is generally derogatory. From Bill Douglas to Lynne Ramsay, successful Scottish directors have continued to be likened to Continental filmmakers. Often the directors themselves, as is the case with Ramsay, insist on their own identification with European directors rather than their Scottish counterparts. This strategy could be likened to the objectives of 'minor' literatures, ascribing their role to write within the margins of the established forms rather than from within.<sup>30</sup>

*Venus Peter* is no exception, although the film was also pigeon-holed as British Art Cinema, with one reviewer pointing to the Director of Photography's previous use of colour in Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio* (1986). The sparkling rusty palate of colours is reminiscent of his work on this earlier film, emblematic of the rise of British Art Cinema in Britain, and also points to further connections with the possibilities of *Venus Peter* to align itself with this practice. In many ways it has. One reviewer maintains, that 'the magical Orkney Islands locations (which are never used merely as visual stuffing) should give *Venus Peter* strong word of mouth and good run for its money with art-house audiences at least'.<sup>31</sup> But the 'art-house' of the film's sensibility more specifically touted was of a decidedly more 'European' nature. One critic pointed to the screenplay as a work which

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<sup>30</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

<sup>31</sup> Kate Bull, 'Reviews: *Venus Peter*', *Screen International*, vol. 733, no. 2, December 1989, p. 16.

'evokes a closer comparison with the work of continental film-makers--the Teviani brothers or early Fellini--than it does with familiar Scottish films'.<sup>32</sup> Philip Strick also maintains that the film owes 'more to Tati and Fellini than to Grierson and Flaherty'.<sup>33</sup>

An attempt to forge links with a Scottish filmmaking tradition might draw comparisons with the poetic cinema of Bill Douglas and the similar use of chiaroscuro lighting effects. Aside from the obvious link of the director's previous work on two of Douglas' films, Duncan Petrie has been eager to make further associations: 'Like Douglas and Radford before him, Sellar achieves a similar sense of the interconnections between objective and subjective dimensions in *Venus Peter*, although this time Peter's immersion in the world of his imagination sets him apart from the emotional and economic realities of a community confronting the imminent demise of its main industry.'<sup>34</sup> Philip Strick, on the other hand, would argue *Venus Peter* to be evidence of Scotland's very own heritage film, replete with tranquil panoramas and cobbled streets - liable to attract tourists - and making it difficult to believe 'that Bill Douglas was undergoing a raw, monochrome childhood not so far away'.<sup>35</sup> In many ways, the film has more in common with other 'coming of age' narratives, more familiar to Irish literature and film. Films such as *Angela's Ashes*, *The Butcher Boy*, and *My Left Foot* present reflections on childhood which to various degrees renegotiate the landscape of nostalgia.

### ***New mythologies: representing the Celtic past***

Praising the film somewhat reluctantly, Duncan Petrie writes: 'whatever their particular merits or demerits, films like ... *Venus Peter* ... marked a new phase in indigenous internal

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<sup>32</sup> Kent, '*Venus Peter*', p. 116.

<sup>33</sup> Strick, 'Feature Films: *Venus Peter*', p. 356.

<sup>34</sup> Petrie, *Screening Scotland*, p. 164.

<sup>35</sup> Strick, 'Feature Films: *Venus Peter*', p. 355.

cultural expressions rather than externally imposed metropolitan fantasies'.<sup>36</sup> It is interesting that *Venus Peter* has been regarded as an example of innovative Art Cinema offering progressive new images for Scotland, but also criticised as a regressive misrepresentation. Roderick Watson's criticism belies the complexities of the text's (and also the film's) reception. On the one hand, he condemns it as 'both equally idealised and coloured by a deeply conservative distaste for contemporary life'. But at the same time he recognises that 'Scottish identity, as woven by the early writers of the modern Literary Renaissance, contains a curious amalgam of radical and conservative elements, neither of which can be entirely separated'.<sup>37</sup> One reading points to the elements of fantasy, or even the sunlit landscapes, holding them up for scrutiny against Bill Douglas' monochrome palette, and criticises them for their nostalgic, regressive reimaginings. Another interpretation renders the film's narration as inhabiting both the simplicity of image of Douglas as well as fantastic, colour-infused landscapes. It is the manoeuvring between these two that is praised. The complexities lie in the film itself, but also in the criticism aiming to either associate the film with, or disengage it from, a particular idea of a Scottish filmmaking tradition.

The alignment of a specific film with a particular cinematic tradition undoubtedly has political implications. This is a reality unmistakably evident in the quotes from Forsyth and O'Brien which open this thesis. The tendency to align *Venus Peter* with a European tradition in a way pre-empts or resists the sort of criticism mounted by Watson. This approach associates the innovative with European identity and fears regressive associations when held up for examination under the light of 'Scottish Cinema'. In other words, it is a defensive mode to sidestep previous misrepresentations. This reaction against Scottish filmmaking is an obstacle the filmmakers of *Venus Peter* encountered when trying to secure financial backing for the project:

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<sup>36</sup> Petrie, *Screening Scotland*, p. 165.

I think that a lot of financiers whom we approached misread the script and thought that because it was set in Scotland this was going to be a harrowing tale of gloomy people, or a worthy documentary portrayal, but that was to miss the point completely. We very much wanted to break with the documentary tradition.<sup>38</sup>

Although the diverse body of criticism surrounding the film implies that the representations on offer are conflicting and problematic, perhaps more important is the effect the criticism of the representations and the representations themselves have on the general production of filmmaking in Scotland. Financing, as Colin McArthur stressed, can prove a crucial influence on the degree of freedom allowed in filmmaking practices. Fortunately, in Young and Sellar's case, they were able to secure funding with little compromise, but their project's initial negative reception is testament to the virtues of McArthur's 'Poor Cinema'.

Although the hopes for increased support for the Scottish Film Industry grow in a newly devolved Scotland and promise to avoid the compromise incurred by commercial interventions, we must remember that these ventures are not without their own political agendas. Ellen-Raïssa Jackson has noted the divergences in political opinions of the film industry, in her reference to the SNP's appropriation of *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, 1995) to bolster the support of Scottish nationalism, compared to *Trainspotting* and its fresh approach praised amongst cultural critics. Jackson, pointing out the incongruities between the two, writes:

The SNP frequently refers to the *Braveheart* effect, by which it means an increased interest in Scotland and an accompanying increase in sympathy for Scottish nationalism and the independence agenda. I note in passing, that I have never heard an SNP member refer to the *Trainspotting* effect in similar terms. Cultural critics, however, are perhaps more interested in such a possibility.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Watson, 'Maps of Desire', p. 292.

<sup>38</sup> Petley, 'No Comfort, More Joy', p. 357.

<sup>39</sup> Ellen-Raïssa Jackson, 'Dislocating the Nation: Political Devolution and Cultural Identity on Stage and Screen', *Edinburgh Review*, no. 110, 2002, pp. 120-131: 124.

These key differences in the way in which political bodies and cultural critics see the foundations of a 'Scottish Cinema' suggest that although devolution has resulted in a more focused attention on the development of 'Scottish' cinema, the increased focus might only ensure future involvement in the *commercial* concerns of mainstream cinema.

## 2. William McIlvanney: *The Big Man* and *Dreaming*

William McIlvanney was born in Ayrshire, the son of a local miner. The author of several novels, short stories, as well as poetry, McIlvanney has also been involved in several ventures in television (drama as well as documentary). His writing often reflects upon the community he hails from and frequently explores the identity of working-class male characters. Accordingly, McIlvanney has been termed 'the first major Scottish writer to have ventured successfully across the class borderline ...and to have concentrated in his writing on the experience of the Scottish working-class'.<sup>1</sup>

As illustrated by this passage from *The Big Man*, McIlvanney maintains he writes from a socialist political perspective.<sup>2</sup>

Like so many of the towns of the industrial West of Scotland, Graithnock had offered little but the means to work. It had exemplified the assumption that working men are workers. Let them work. In the meantime, other people could get on with the higher things, what they liked to call "culture". At the same time, the workers had made a culture of their own. It was raw. (p. 19)

In this passage, the influence of McIlvanney's background is clear. As with a great deal of his fiction, his focus rests on the working-class male and the examination of the idea of 'culture' within this environment, an examination which is perhaps emblematic of McIlvanney's own struggle to reconcile his occupation as a writer with a culture where employment has often entailed manual physical labour, and perhaps more significantly, in the shadow of a father who worked as a miner.<sup>3</sup> McIlvanney's focus functions as a

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<sup>1</sup> Keith Dixon, 'Writing on the Borderline: The Works of William McIlvanney' in G. Ross Roy (ed.), *Studies in Scottish Literature* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina, 1989), pp. 142-157: 142.

<sup>2</sup> Murray and Tait, 'Plato in a Boiler Suit', p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> McIlvanney makes brief reference to the difficulty of justifying your status as a writer in Scottish working-class culture, in *The English Programme: Scottish Writers* (Channel 4, Wark-Clements). Seamus Heaney famously negotiates his work as writer by reference to manual labour in his poem 'Digging' in *Death of a Naturalist* (London: Faber, 1966), pp. 3-4. Like McIlvanney, Heaney's depiction of manual labour as a source of dignity serves as a counterpoint and potential source of conflict when justifying his own worth as a writer.

personal reflection on his relationship with his father, but more broadly, the focus on the working-class male in post-industrial Scotland is part and parcel of what he sees as a greater political agenda, and what critics praise as his 'commitment to the idea of an indigenous Scottish humanism rooted in the industrial, urban experience of the west-central working class'.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Douglas Gifford has warned that *The Big Man* in particular might lead a reader to conclude it 'highlights the male violence it professes to condemn'.<sup>5</sup> This is the double bind that McIlvanney struggles with, and which his critics endeavour to entangle.

In a programme for Channel 4 focusing on Scottish writers, McIlvanney argues that the representation of violence in *The Big Man* is not a celebration, but a necessary component in his critique of Thatcherism.<sup>6</sup> McIlvanney has elsewhere characterised the relevance of the representation of violence in a similar fashion, describing its role in this critique as crucial in the representation of 'a metaphor for capitalist society'.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the violence represents the underlying conflicts between Thatcher's Britain and the working class. Keith Dixon has likewise responded to criticism of McIlvanney's work by stressing his commitment to social realism.<sup>8</sup> If violence is represented, it is only because it exists in reality. What McIlvanney's narratives ultimately uncover through their representations of violent masculinity is the very real brutality of the state.

The realist representation of industrial or post-industrial Scotland has long been the subject of criticism. Studies of Scottish literature point to the publication of the early twentieth century novels of George Douglas Brown and John MacDougall Hay as signalling the birth

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<sup>4</sup> Ray Ryan, *Ireland and Scotland*, p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> Gifford, Dunnigan, and MacGillivray, *Scottish Literature*, p. 867.

<sup>6</sup> *The English Programme* (Channel 4).

<sup>7</sup> Murray and Tait, 'Plato in a Boiler Suit', p. 145.

<sup>8</sup> Keith Dixon, "'No fairies. No monsters. Just people.'" Resituating the work of William McIlvanney', in Susanne Hagemann (ed.), *Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), pp. 187-198.

of the socialist realist tradition established in direct opposition to the kailyard tradition.<sup>9</sup> This tradition, characterised by its heavy focus on the Scottish working-class male, otherwise branded the 'hard man', has been described by Jeremy Idle as rejecting the 'cosy domesticity' of the kailyard tradition in favour of an 'aggressive intellect'.<sup>10</sup> As Roderick Watson has detailed, Brown shares with McIlvanney 'a tone of ironic detachment, a voice whose apparently documentary objectivity is in fact the fine correlative for an inner rage'.<sup>11</sup> Although the new literary genre was initially welcomed for its relief from the flowery confines of the 'cabbage patch' literary style, it has since been criticised for merely serving as a *new* stereotype, which would eventually prove equally regressive. As Idle has explained, its new forms of representation ensured that 'the tradition that sought to escape the simplified myth of the kailyard by engaging in the gutsy realities of the hard urban landscape finds itself lodged within a different but analogous myth'.<sup>12</sup>

As is apparent in the debates circulating throughout the previous chapter, Scottish film criticism has also expressed the urgency of debunking the myths of tartanry, kailyard and Clydesidism. In collections such as Colin McArthur's *Scotch Reels*, or Eddie Dick's *From Limelight to Satellite*, films with Scotland as their subject matter have been examined for their limited representations, and a possible way forward for future representations.<sup>13</sup> Within both spheres of criticism, literary and cinematic, McIlvanney's work has equally

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<sup>9</sup> Roderick Watson's term for this mode, the 'anti-pastoral' or 'counter-pastoral', is clearly based on its distinction from the kailyard. See Roderick Watson, "'Oor Ain Folk?'" National Types and Stereotypes in Arcadia', in Horst W. Drescher and Hermann Völkel (ed.), *Nationalism in Literature* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1989), pp. 131-142: 136 and 139.

<sup>10</sup> Jeremy Idle, 'McIlvanney, Masculinity and Scottish Literature', *Scottish Affairs*, no. 2, Winter 1993, pp. 50-57.

<sup>11</sup> Watson, "'Oor Ain Folk?'" p. 138.

<sup>12</sup> Idle, 'McIlvanney, Masculinity and Scottish Literature', p. 56.

<sup>13</sup> Colin McArthur (ed.) *Scotch Reels: Scotland in Cinema and Television* (London: BFI, 1982); John Caughie, in 'Representing Scotland: new questions for Scottish Cinema', Dick (ed.) *From Limelight to Satellite*, pp. 13-30, remarks that their efforts in McArthur's earlier study had been somewhat narrow in focus and ultimately restricted the accuracy of their conclusions.



been scrutinised for its heavily masculine narratives, adhering to 'hard man' mythology, and overlooking the woman's perspective in favour of the working-class male's.<sup>14</sup>

Not surprisingly critics have aligned McIlvanney's fiction with cultural texts which have been similarly criticised. Julie Watt closely associates McIlvanney's work with television, namely the serial, and compares it with programmes such as *Tutti Frutti*, *Tales from the Edge*, and, most interestingly, *Taggart*.<sup>15</sup> McIlvanney, who has himself written for Channel 4, seems to share a similar style with the *Taggart*. In fact, the similarity may prove more than chance, since one television producer originally involved in the potential development of an adaptation of *Laidlaw* subsequently went on to produce *Taggart*.<sup>16</sup> However, programmes like *Taggart* and *Tutti Frutti* have gone largely unrecognised in television studies. Hugh Herbert's essay focusing on 'regional' television successes, somewhat atypical in studies of British television, focuses on the success of *Tutti Frutti*, and offers one passing comment on *Taggart*. The absence of television successes in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, he surmises, may be due to insufficient regional companies, or perhaps, an inadequate or inappropriate supply of subject matter (i.e. the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland and natural disasters in Wales).<sup>17</sup> Scotland's downfall according to Herbert, it could probably be assumed, would no doubt be the figure of the hard man. Ultimately, what Herbert's comments on regional television drama reveal is not so much the deficiencies of production, but of criticism. In other words, Hubert's assessment of their failure is most supported by the programmes' conspicuous absence from several studies of British television.

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<sup>14</sup> See Beth Dickson, 'Class and Being in the Novels of William McIlvanney', in Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (eds.), *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), pp. 54-70; Alan McGillivray, 'Natural Loyalties: The Work of William McIlvanney', *Laverock*, no. 2, 1996, pp. 13-23; Martin Stollery, *Trainspotting*, *The Ultimate Film Guides* (London: York Press, 2000); Spring, 'Image and Text'; Michael O'Pray, 'The Big Man', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 57, no. 681, 1990, pp. 287-288.

<sup>15</sup> Watt, 'Beam Me Up, Scotty', p.104.

<sup>16</sup> Sarah Neely, 'Interview with Mike Alexander', February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2002 (unpublished source).

In many ways, McIlvanney's fiction seems to resist an alliance with the 'hard man' tradition in film, television, and literature. Although his work is criticised for its limitations in terms of genre (i.e. playing into 'a realist tradition that offers little scope for innovation or experiment'<sup>18</sup>), other critiques suggest further complexities are at play in McIlvanney's style. For example, Keith Dixon has located McIlvanney's body of work somewhere 'between "kailyard" and "realist" tendencies',<sup>19</sup> perhaps hinting at the elements of fantasy in his work more akin to the intermingling of myth and reality in *Venus Peter*. Even when McIlvanney is described by Marshall Walker in his *Scottish Literature since 1707* as representative of 'conventional realism', his work is discussed in the context of a trend in Scottish literature committed to the subversion of realism.<sup>20</sup> In the writing of Alasdair Gray, Iain Banks and Irvine Welsh, Walker explains, 'realism alternates with surrealism', whereas in the work of Emma Tennant, A.L. Kennedy and Gray's *Poor Things*, realism gives way to the magical.<sup>21</sup> These various subversions of the real are explained by Walker as a process whereby 'an increasingly complex post-modern world elicits a profusion of fictional styles in an age of unprecedented diversity' whose 'recurrent theme is disillusionment'.<sup>22</sup> Although the analysis is succinct, what Walker seems to be overlooking is the underlying connection between realist representation and the surreal, and the varying degrees of realism which might possibly be presented.

While several of the fictional works looked at throughout this thesis are concerned with realist representation, this does not overrule the importance of possible surrealist representations. If we were to classify Patrick McCabe, Christopher Rush, Irvine Welsh,

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<sup>17</sup> Hugh Herbert, 'Tutti Frutti (John Byrne)', George W Brandt (ed.), *British Television Drama in the 1980s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 178-195: 178.

<sup>18</sup> Newton, 'William McIlvanney's *Docherty*', p. 102.

<sup>19</sup> Dixon, 'Writing on the Borderline'.

<sup>20</sup> Marshall Walker, *Scottish Literature Since 1707* (London and New York: Longman, 1996), p. 319.

<sup>21</sup> Walker, *Scottish Literature Since 1707*, p. 319.

and Alan Warner as bearing the hallmarks of social realist representation, we would be overlooking their rebellion against that very same realist form. Gifford, Dunnigan, and MacGillivray have explained that although the employment of the surreal is hardly a contemporary device, and has been used in the fiction of Mackay Brown, George Friel, Robin Jenkins, and Burns, it currently exists as a brand of 'creative eccentricity designed to destabilize conventional understanding of traditional Scotlands'.<sup>23</sup> This, they maintain, is illustrative of 'the predominant theme of current Scottish writing, that of the emergence from a traumatised personal - and modern Scottish - past'.<sup>24</sup>

In another essay Gifford argues that

major changes took place throughout the 1980s, with writers like Edwin Morgan, Alasdair Gray, and Liz Lochhead, in poetry, fiction, and drama, developing a new kind of imaginative relationship with their country and its culture, a relationship which refused to accept a simple realism or generally bleak and economically deprived urban character.<sup>25</sup>

Rather than accept the form of representation as entirely divorced from realist tendencies, Gifford identifies the variations in contemporary representations as defined by 'the creation of magical and transforming visions of Scotlands, thirled to the older identities created by past writers and historians, but no longer employing their absolutes'.<sup>26</sup> So while Walker's evaluation hastens to consign McIlvanney's style to 'conventional realism', Gifford's analysis might read his work somewhat differently. Instead of looking at McIlvanney's representation as conforming wholeheartedly to well-worn forms, it is important to recognise his work as a negotiation and engagement with them.

<sup>22</sup> Walker, *Scottish Literature Since 1707*, p. 319.

<sup>23</sup> Gifford, Dunnigan, and MacGillivray, *Scottish Literature*, pp. 957-958.

<sup>24</sup> Gifford, Dunnigan, and MacGillivray, *Scottish Literature*, p. 960.

<sup>25</sup> Gifford, 'Imagining Scotlands', p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> Gifford, 'Imagining Scotlands', p. 37.

### *The Big Man*

Directed by David Leland, the adaptation of *The Big Man* was released in 1990.<sup>27</sup> The film, scripted by Don MacPherson, did not involve McIlvanney himself in the process. Like many of the films mentioned in this study, this adaptation owes its existence to the support and backing of television. It was produced by British Satellite Broadcasting (BSB), British Screen, Scottish Television (STV) Film Enterprises, and Palace Productions. However, as Duncan Petrie was quick to point out, *The Big Man* was actually STV's only Scottish feature film since the 1980s and is a production he considers to be 'more mainstream' rather than innovative.<sup>28</sup> Eddie Dick in *From Limelight to Satellite* also questions the film's indigenous intentions by pointing out that the film only marginally casts Scottish actors, placing them in minor roles.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps like the successful response from the funding bodies which *Venus Peter* received after enlisting the well-established Irish actor, Ray McNally, *The Big Man* experienced a similar commercial pull. The highly acclaimed Irish actor, Liam Neeson, playing the central role of Dan would have also ensured a reasonable degree of success.<sup>30</sup>

### Filmic style

Intertextually, the film works on several levels. Because of the tendency for critics to relate McIlvanney's fiction to television serials such as *Taggart*, it seems only logical that an adaptation of his work would reinforce this connection. However, the film adaptation of *The Big Man* draws on several other film genres. On a rather basic level, the subject of the film itself, boxing, is well-trodden ground. The cinema has often called upon boxing as

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<sup>27</sup> David Leland, a screenwriter and actor as well as a director, has also collaborated with writer J.G. Ballard on *Running Wild* (1999) and with director Neil Jordan on *Mona Lisa* (1986).

<sup>28</sup> Duncan Petrie, 'The New Scottish Cinema', in Hjort and Mackenzie (eds.), *Cinema and Nation*, pp. 153-169: 159.

<sup>29</sup> Dick, *From Limelight to Satellite*, p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> By this point Neeson had played key roles in several films and television programmes including Michael in *Lamb*, a ghost haunting American tourists in Neil Jordan's *High Spirits* (1988), and a member of the IRA in Mike Hodge's *A Prayer for the Dying* (1987). He later played another Scotsman, Rob Roy.

a subject matter in which to examine a central protagonist's negotiation of his own masculinity. Stylistically, the film version of McIlvanney's work adopts various postures recognisable from film noir. But perhaps most significantly, the film aims at developing various tropes familiar to the Western. Seemingly disparate from the original fictional style, Leland has openly discussed his interest in developing the film in a style akin to the Western.

So while *The Big Man's* alignment with particular film genres might make it readily adaptable to film, McIlvanney's style of narration seems to pose difficulties. Ken Newton, drawing a distinction between McIlvanney's narrative style and that of Kelman and Welsh, argues that what separates McIlvanney from the style of these two is his tendency to *tell* rather than *show*.<sup>31</sup> In their case study of *Docherty*, Isobel Murray and Bob Tait describe McIlvanney's internal narration as closer to narrative styles associated with an 'intervention of a much more sophisticated, articulate authorial voice, analysing and interpreting the material'.<sup>32</sup> Unlike Kelman and Welsh's unmediated approach, which affords direct access to the central characters, McIlvanney often employs two different dialects, the working-class Scots dialects of his characters, and his own register – a sort of 'metalanguage' riding over the diegesis of the story. Although this 'dichotomy' of styles has been criticised for suppressing the characters under an 'authoritative' voice, Newton expresses the importance of the voice of the narration in order to get McIlvanney's political message across and suggests Kelman and Welsh may appear amoral because of a lack of mediation. I would argue the opposite. A large part of Kelman and Welsh's morality derives from their technique of allowing the characters to speak for themselves. McIlvanney's intervening narration could be read as obtrusive, or as Roderick Watson has posited it results in "the characters" continuing status as "bodies", as elements contained in a ... pressure cooker.

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<sup>31</sup> Newton, 'William McIlvanney's *Docherty*', pp. 112-3.

<sup>32</sup> Isobel Murray and Bob Tait, *Ten Modern Scottish Novels* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1984), pp. 168-9.

Thus their trapped status as fictive creations in his book is entirely commensurate with how McIlvanney feels the world at large to have treated them.<sup>33</sup> Even the critics' praise for McIlvanney's ability to serve as the voice for the 'inarticulate'<sup>34</sup> belies the source of discrimination towards accent and class.

This distinction is particularly relevant to the writing style's translation to film. What makes Welsh so adaptable, like other writers discussed in this study, is the lack of external narrative intervention. The characters' internal emotions are often explicitly detailed through their actions, words and external environment. The freedom this affords the characters (freed from a moral authoritative voice) also becomes a freedom for the adaptors who are devoid of the burden often posed by external narration, and likewise released from the threat of criticism lamenting the loss of the 'narrative voice' of the 'original'. Often the case, if the adaptors choose to forego the second layer of narration, in favour of direct access to the characters, the mediation of the authoritative narrative voice delivering the political message is at risk of being lost. What is relayed through this non-Scots dialect narration, projecting McIlvanney's own reflections onto the events within the character's lives, is at risk of being lost in the adaptation to film.

In fact, the loss of this second layer of narration might be at the root of some of the film's criticism. Duncan Petrie concludes that the 'pressure on *The Big Man* to appeal to an international audience – manifest in the casting, the melodramatic motivation of the narrative and the representation of the working-class community – undermines its ability to engage with the specificities of the subject-matter and to speak to and for a particular kind of social experience'.<sup>35</sup> Here, Petrie puts the blame on the commercial influences of cinema and its flattening effect on the subtleties of McIlvanney's narrative. The criticism of the

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<sup>33</sup> Watson, "'Oor Ain Folk?'" p. 139.

<sup>34</sup> Dixon, 'Writing on the Borderline', p. 153.

<sup>35</sup> Petrie, *Screening Scotland*, p. 153.

resulting constraints of production, applies to many other films looked at in this study. It seems that the mainstream film in particular is deemed incapable of representing the complex representations on the page. This new representation of commercial cinema takes away from the freedom that might have been incurred by the characters' lack of narrative intervention through the loss of an outside narrator. But instead of opting for the direct representation of the characters, the adaptation is best described as exchanging McIlvanney's narration for that of the constraints of mainstream cinema. Rather than narration conveying McIlvanney's political message, the film, instead, is free to promote its own.

### **The Femme Fatale stands by her Hard Man**

In the novel, Dan Scoular is a celebrated hero, described as 'quietly kind', and respected for 'his refusal to abuse a gift or turn it unfairly to his own advantage' (p. 22). But as the narrative self-consciously points out, the town 'had mythologized his past and falsified his present. They had made him over into something that they wanted him to be' (p.22). In other words, the town believes him to be something he is not; he is a projection of the community's fantasies and desires. They imagine him to be non-aggressive, when really his childhood experiences are riddled with violent episodes. They imagine him to have never 'looked at another woman' but the narrator says 'they should have asked his wife Betty, an attractive and spirited woman, about that'.<sup>36</sup> We learn a few pages later in the narrative that Dan even hit her once. In some ways, Dan may be characterised as the 'anti-hero' in a similar way that Julie Watt characterises the 'wee hard man'.<sup>37</sup> Watt draws on this figure as an example of a Scottish hero prevalent in Scottish cinema, but even more so

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<sup>36</sup> Petrie, *Screening Scotland*, p. 23.

<sup>37</sup> Watt, 'Beam Me Up, Scotty', p.104.

in television. This is evident in a recent series of *Taggart* which visibly identifies itself in the first episode's title: 'Hard Man'.<sup>38</sup>

Watt's analysis surrounding the 'wee hard man' as anti-hero developed out of the response to a paper on the 'dark tone' of Scottish cinema which she delivered in Quebec. Questioned about the dark tone and whether or not it bore any relation to the types of hero, or complete lack of heroes, prevalent in Scottish cinema, Watt responded by including a version of a paper on the 'wee hard man' in the publication of the conference proceedings.<sup>39</sup> Although Watt does not identify any additional heroes, her focus on the wee hard man as an anti-hero highlights a sense of lack or substitution for satisfying heroes. In a similar regard, although Dan Scoular is the celebrated hero, his limitations are known, and perhaps even accepted. In the community Scoular is, although not perfect, reimagined to heroic proportions. Some critics have read Dan's brother, Scott, as a metaphor for Scotland,<sup>40</sup> and Dan Scoular could also be read metaphorically, particularly in this instance drawing comparisons between the community's 'reimagining' of his character and that of Scotland's.

Cairns Craig has explained the general meaning of Scottish culture's 'reimagining' in a light not entirely dissimilar from that expressed in *The Commitments*' 'adoption' of Black-American culture. Craig writes:

Scotland's experience is acculturated into film through the myths of the society's extinction; living Scotland acculturates itself through the media whose images have power--Country & Western singers in pubs, wild west shoot-outs in dance-halls, Scottish oil-workers who adopt American accents are but the periodic extremes of a deeply ingrained imaginative transference of our own experience into the terms provided by the media of another culture.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> 'Hard Man', *Taggart*, dir. Ian Madden, ITV, trans. December 4, 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Watt, 'Beam Me Up Scotty', p. 104.

<sup>40</sup> Ray Ryan, *Ireland and Scotland*, p.77.

<sup>41</sup> Cairns Craig, 'Visitors from the Stars: Scottish Film Culture', *Cencrastus*, New Year 1983, pp. 6-11.



We can either conclude that Dan Scoular exists as the community's 'anti-hero' in alignment with Watt's 'wee hard man', or we could read Scoular as evidence of the community's 'imaginative transference' of someone who might otherwise be perceived as an ordinary guy into the classical hero through his association with the violent public spectacle of boxing. However this 'reimagining' is interpreted, Scoular becomes representative of a 'damaged' hero, one whose fate is in the hands of the decaying prosperity of the working-class culture from which he hails. Boxing becomes a way of living out the fantasy of masculinity in an environment where previous markers of masculinity, involving the working life of the factory, are on the decline.

But as the novel and film stress, Dan is not always a hero in the eyes of every member of the community. Dan is very plainly delineated by McIlvanney as the *working-class* hero. His wife Betty, from a middle-class background, finds difficulty reconciling her life with Dan with her parents' own expectations for her. Betty's mobility in comparison with Dan's testifies to what Christopher Harvie has identified the gender differences within class structures (i.e. class is a male-based structure and women generally tend to be 'more mobile').<sup>42</sup>

McIlvanney's deadened depiction of Betty's parents and their disapproval of Dan emphasises a superficiality within middle-class values. The narrator explains:

For her mother and father the manners had become the most important things, because that way they never needed to go beyond them, and could make their lives a continuous ritual round of attitudes in which any real feeling occurred like a short-circuit. (p. 34)

In this passage, the dependence on ritual, guidelines and consistency designed to reinforce a privileged status quo is highlighted in stark contrast to the need for escape, fantasy and emotion, conveyed in the hero worship of the rest of the community. The obsession with

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<sup>42</sup> Christopher Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 86. Alternatively, women's 'mobility' within class structures could also be interpreted as a general exclusion from these structures in the first place.

surfaces over 'real feeling' is illustrative of McIlvanney's tackling of the issues surrounding class conflict evident in *The Big Man*, but also forms a significant theme throughout much of his writing.<sup>43</sup>

It is the very real issues of class which in the film give way to the complete immersion in fantasy that the book only moderately entertains. Instead of commenting on the divide in psyche between the Scottish middle/working classes which the narrative and the narration both convey, the film realizes Cairns Craig's definition of 'imaginative transference'.<sup>44</sup>

What makes this even more poignant in relation to Craig's comments is the manner in which the film subsequently develops the representation of Dan as hero. Similar to Craig's description of a culture's appropriation of Country and Western, David Leland identifies the film's development of the narrative as a Western, but also imbibing the community's seedy underbelly with elements of the film noir.<sup>45</sup> In this style, Glasgow gangsters are portrayed as cousins to the Chicago mob. Women, also affected by the generic shift, move from the representations familiar to Scottish fiction which Jeremy Idle has criticised as two-dimensional portraits in which women are a 'mixture of brave stand-by-your-man victims and whining snobs',<sup>46</sup> to a less conventional representation, albeit still two-dimensional.

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<sup>43</sup> K.M Newton in 'William McIlvanney's *Docherty*' explores McIlvanney's representation of class in which the middle class, 'associated with deadness ... has little of worth to offer the working class' (p. 104).

<sup>44</sup> Cairns Craig, 'Visitors from the Stars', p. 8. This identification with the American West is evidenced in John Byrne's six-part television series for the BBC, *Your Cheatin' Heart*, covering Glasgow's Country and Western scene or in Glasgow's version of the Memphis *Grand Ol' Opry*, offering shoot-outs and a ceremonial folding of the Confederate flag. *Your Cheatin' Heart* first aired on BBC 1 in October 1990.

<sup>45</sup> Although it could be argued that McIlvanney emphasises the connection between mainstream cinema and the novel through several textual references (i.e. *Jaws*, *Raging Bull*, *Rocky*) Craig W. McLuckie, in *Researching McIlvanney: A Critical and Bibliographic Introduction* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999), describes these references as employed 'to make [readers] feel at home. It is a strategy of articulation' (p. 34).

<sup>46</sup> Idle, 'McIlvanney, Masculinity and Scottish Literature', p. 56.

In a section beginning 'Failing marriages are haunted', Betty, seated at the dressing table, notices her husband's reflection behind her in the mirror, initiating her recollection of their wedding day and Dan delivering his speech: 'She remembered that moment now, as she knelt at her dressing-table mirror: "My wife and I ..." Staring at herself, she saw that other face, as if her past were a helpless spirit hovering over her present' (p.25). Gazing at her reflection, this memory encourages Betty to consider her identity: 'Watching her face without make-up, she remembered an expression that had fascinated her as a girl. She had always applied it to herself in the third person, making herself in her mind into the woman she imagined she might become' (p. 26). In her imaginings, Betty views herself from first person, but also as the reader, in third person. She imagines herself as 'an actress' (p. 26) until finally the spell - and narrative - is broken as the sound of her two young children fighting brings her back into her role as 'mother' (p. 26).

In this passage, Betty effectively divides her identity neatly into her present self and a version of her self from the past, 'a helpless spirit hovering over her present' (p. 25). But in this reflection on her identity Betty imagines refuge in the idea of the mask, becoming 'an actress', something outside her role as 'mother' (p.26). In this instance, viewing Betty from her own standpoint, it seems McIlvanney is offering a more progressive image of women than the one he is so often accused of presenting. Nevertheless, Beth Dickson has argued that even though McIlvanney may 'attempt to see women from their own point of view ... other parts of his fiction tell a different story: often when women appear in a position of significance, they inhabit a stereotype'.<sup>47</sup> Certainly the film, unable to represent Betty's internal reflection, risks succumbing to the two dimensionality of the secondary role played by the companion to the hard man.

Building on a structure similar to the novel, the film opens with the image of the couple as newly weds. Although the possibility of re-imagining the hard man myth seems likely, the

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<sup>47</sup> Dickson, 'Class and Being in the Novels of William McIlvanney', p. 60.

generic conventions of 'mainstream' cinema prove equally powerful in rendering a two-dimensional depiction of Betty and other female characters. In the opening scene, shot in slow-motion to evoke the past-tense and feelings of nostalgia, the two are strewn with confetti. This scene is then interspersed with shots of Betty seated at her dressing table and looking contemplatively at her own reflection while applying lipstick. Here, the narrative is framed in the context of Betty's point-of-view, and although this might be viewed as an attempt to rewrite in the woman's perspective, we must remember that Betty is not the main focus of the narrative, and that her 'perspective' only further privileges the status of her husband, Danny Scoular.

The adaptation of McIlvanney's novel has been described by one reviewer as a 'Hollywood film noir set in Glasgow'.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, McIlvanney's Laidlaw novels have been received by critics as American detective fiction transferred to Glasgow.<sup>49</sup> Admittedly, the traffic moves more than one way, and rather than read the detective style of Scottish fiction or film as borrowed rather than owned outright, we could locate certain developments of the genre in Scotland that have been borrowed by Hollywood or American detective fiction. Cinematically, *The Big Man* draws on the image of the Femme Fatale, often contrasting the raw physicality of Neeson's butch combative body with the freshly painted, well-manicured, blood red nails of various females. In one scene in particular, Dan gains consciousness after being battered in a fight and finds himself in a bath at Mason's house. Mason's daughter walks in wearing a pink silky robe and dims the lights. She leans over the bath and opens an elaborate case filled with cocaine. The camera then directs its focus to her manicured hands, serving as a counterpoint to a close-up of Dan's heavily bandaged one. In the following scene, her red nails again serve in contrast to Neeson's bandaged hands whose coarseness are emphasised as they move across her body. Like McIlvanney's novel which, in the fight scenes in particular, contrasts femininity against the raw

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<sup>48</sup> Nick Radio, 'The Big Man', *Screen International*, vol. 772, no. 1, September 1990, p. 21.

<sup>49</sup> See Beth Dickson, 'William McIlvanney's Laidlaw Novels', *Laverock*, no. 1, 1995, pp. 27-28.

masculinity of the male-dominated environment, the camera lingers on the feminine painted nails of Mason's daughter with the same degree of attention that, towards the end of Dan's defeat in the boxing match, is devoted to his blistered hands.

### **The allegory of the Western, fantasy, and America**

As Cairns Craig's comment on the connection between Scottish culture and Country and Western suggests, the adoption of the mythologies of another culture allows for an open-ended interpretation of Scottish culture, formerly subjected to more restricted interpretations. The identification with romantic heroes of the American Wild West opens up previously fixed and closed identities. In the case of Scottish literature, the 'anti-hero' of the 'wee hard man' is given the possibility of reinventing his character in a variety of ways. But even if we are to call this a 'reinvention' of the Scottish hero, we must still consider the ways in which the hero functions in a similar fashion, particularly in its exclusion of the role of women and possibly other minority groups.

McIlvanney views the central image of the novel as the 'bare knuckle fight'.<sup>50</sup> Performing an analogous function to the shoot-out in the Western, the central image of the 'bare knuckle fight' serves as a central metaphor for cultural injustices. This image also seems to have been adopted in the film as a central metaphor, borrowed from the genre of the Western. The film was criticised for its lack of subtlety and heavy-handed reliance on generic conventions. Michael O'Pray called it a 'weakly scripted muddle', which he attributes to David Leland, whose other films - *Wish You Were Here* (1987) and *Personal Services* (Terry Jones, 1987) - he sees as sharing 'common features: good performances in the central roles, superficial social backgrounds, and a tendency towards cliché'.<sup>51</sup> Even though Leland's focus is on the Western, O'Pray criticises him for overlooking a wealth of previous boxing films such as *The Set-Up* (Robert Wise, 1949), *Body and Soul* (Robert

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<sup>50</sup> Murray and Tait, 'Plato in a Boiler Suit', p. 145.

<sup>51</sup> O'Pray, 'The Big Man', p. 287.

Rossen, 1947), *Fat City* (John Huston, 1972), and *Raging Bull* (1980).<sup>52</sup> Another boxing film, made after *The Big Man* (and O'Pray's review), which might also serve as a useful comparison is Jim Sheridan's film following the turmoil of a non-sectarian boxing club in Northern Ireland, *The Boxer* (1997). Although I agree with O'Pray's comparisons, the similarities seem most apparent with Sheridan's film. In *The Boxer*, the sport is also viewed as a sort of social fantasy which allows the community to escape, while at that same time offering a space in which to project political conflict. In this sense Danny, played by Daniel Day Lewis, like Dan Scoular, is presented as the silent hero upon whom the community projects their aspirations, but in reality is no different from anyone else (i.e. he too becomes party to violence and has an affair, etc.). Both men are elevated to heroic status through their involvement in boxing, but are never divorced from the problems facing them and their community.

The film's apparent lack of acknowledgement of the boxing films that have gone before and its position within that genre is more than likely testament to Leland's investment in the narrative's alignment with the Western. As Leland himself has explained: 'I wanted to tap into those things that make a Western—the concern about community, about historical change.'<sup>53</sup> The allegory within *The Big Man* is thus played out in the myth or fantasy of the Western. Michael O'Pray, in his article on *The Big Man* compares this association with the Irish cinema's own long history in relation to the genre, in films such as *The Quiet Man*.<sup>54</sup> What O'Pray's preference of the boxing genre over the Western seems to further reveal is his distaste for the lack of realism in the former. His accusation describes how the film 'quite unintelligibly and insensitively, given the seriousness and still painful contemporaneity of this setting, tries to be a kind of realist fairy-tale'.<sup>55</sup> Again, as with

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<sup>52</sup> O'Pray, 'The Big Man', p. 287.

<sup>53</sup> O'Pray, 'The Big Man', p. 287.

<sup>54</sup> O'Pray, 'The Big Man', p. 287.

<sup>55</sup> O'Pray, 'The Big Man', p. 288.

many other criticisms voiced throughout this thesis, O'Pray's uneasiness proves most acute in relation to the film's digressions from an unrelenting commitment to a realist aesthetic. It would be unfair to say that the film betrays McIlvanney's intentions. On the contrary, McIlvanney, in his own writing, although he argues his primary commitment to be representing working-class Scotland, also expresses the need to employ a popular genre in order to reach a wide readership, but rather than adhering to conventions of a particular genre entirely, he chooses to work subversively within that particular genre (i.e. the detective novel).<sup>56</sup>

### *Dreaming*

McIlvanney's second work of fiction to be adapted into a feature-length film was his short story 'Dreaming', a narrative which takes a day in the life of a disaffected west coast Scottish youth seeking employment.<sup>57</sup> In a similar fashion to Joyce's *Ulysses*, the narrative expands and contracts with the inner-musings of its character and the enriched fantasy world constructed throughout the narrative and more actively subverts realism than any other McIlvanney narrative such as *The Big Man*. *Dreaming* was directed by Mike Alexander, documentary filmmaker and director of the feature *As an Eilean* (1993), an adaptation of short stories by Ian Crichton Smith. *As an Eilean*, like Alexander's adaptation of McIlvanney's short story, follows a disaffected youth, but rather than suffering from an oppressive urban environment, the central character, Callum, suffers at the hands of his strict mother, who won't let him out of the house to see a girl he likes on the Sabbath. But like Alexander's first film, and McIlvanney's other adaptation, *The Big Man*, through appropriating other cultures a bridge is formed across which the characters can escape their own environment. In *As an Eilean*, it is someone's return from Texas and their performance of Country and Western songs that serves this purpose.

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<sup>56</sup> See Robert P. Winston, 'Travellers and Tourists: Rules of Engagement in William McIlvanney's Detective Fiction', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, no. 32, 2001, pp. 117-131.

*Dreaming* was released for television in 1990 by BBC Scotland as part of their 'Screen Two' Series. Alexander had originally worked with McIlvanney on developing a version of *Laidlaw* which unfortunately never got off the ground. Although a substantial amount of money was secured for optioning the book and financing McIlvanney to write the script, and a good deal of interest was expressed from key players involved in the Scottish film industry - including producer Ian Smith and Sean Connery - the film was never made. The rights to the novel were eventually bought by a Canadian company, and the novel has still to be realized on screen.<sup>58</sup> The failure of this adaptation to materialise has been described by Alexander as something which 'broke our hearts', but it was also a valued experience in which Alexander 'got to know Willy very well' and would prompt the development of future projects between writer and director. Their next project, didn't involve McIlvanney's fiction, or any fiction at all, but was a five-part documentary for BBC Scotland on Scottish football which McIlvanney wrote and delivered the commentary for. At this time, McIlvanney was passing on short stories for Alexander to read as he was writing them. Bill Bryden, head of drama for BBC Scotland, and committed to developing Scotland as a centre for writers,<sup>59</sup> had also commissioned McIlvanney to write something around his short story, 'Dreaming'. It was McIlvanney who requested Alexander to be the director for the project, and Bill Bryden accordingly backed Alexander and pushed for the project as part of the 'Screen Two' series. Alexander says it was his familiarity with the writer and his work which accounted for the ease with which the two developed the project together.

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<sup>57</sup> William McIlvanney, 'Dreaming', in *Walking Wounded* (London: Sceptre, 1990), pp. 163-175. All further references will be to this edition.

<sup>58</sup> Neely, 'Interview with Mike Alexander'.

<sup>59</sup> Hugh Herbert, 'Tutti Frutti (John Byrne)', p. 178.



### **McIlvanney, art and working-class culture**

Much of McIlvanney's portrayal of the working-class male reflects his own difficulty in reconciling his background with his occupation as a writer. Like Sammy, thought by his father to watch too much television, read too many books, and listen to too much music, McIlvanney originates from a culture where bringing in a wage is what is valued. McIlvanney casts Sammy as an outsider, described by his parents as 'not natural', highlighting the local perception of anything that is outside what is traditionally valued as working-class experience. On the other hand, it is Sammy who views his material environment as 'unreal' (p. 167). At a meeting with an advisor at his local Job Centre, Sammy recalls his father calling him a 'dreamer', and he reflects: 'But who was dreaming here? Did this man really believe the platitudes he was intoning? He certainly seemed to. Sammy could almost smell the incense. He felt the room go dim as a Buddhist temple. Somewhere candles were burning' (p. 167). In this instance, it is the unearthed behaviour of the potential employer in the job interview that forces Sammy to imagine himself in a more appealing dream world instead of the 'ugly Victorian building fairly liberally encrusted with birdshit' (p. 168). It is the sense of this oppressive environment that the writer reacts against.

### **The explosive impact of café culture: Sammy and the fantasy of a European Scotland**

If, as critics insist, *The Big Man* is a gritty realist film, then 'Dreaming', the second adaptation of McIlvanney's fiction, is a different matter. Drawing on McIlvanney's fantastical short story which portrays the intimate fantasies and dream world of Sammy Nelson, a disenchanted youth trying to carve a niche for himself in the midst of Thatcherite Britain, the film operates on several levels. By utilizing the various layers of fantasy existent in the short story as a springboard from which to develop a visually rich narrative, the film insists on its inclusion in the body of work Duncan Petrie has lauded as representative of a 'new engagement with the Scottish city, coupled with a new exploration

of artifice and the creation of imaginary worlds'.<sup>60</sup> This new genre would include *Venus Peter*, which relies upon Peter's fantasy to release him from some of the more bitter realities facing him. Although scarcely the case in *Venus Peter*, often the films exploring urban anxieties through outlets of fantasy produce humorous effects. In 'Dreaming' Sammy's anxieties over getting a job induce vivid comic fantasies.

The story opens with the sentence: 'He was dreaming'. Sammy is then woken by his mother for an interview. While his fantasy world lures him into contemplation, the world around him becomes fertile ground on which he projects his fantasies. In the film, following the narrative of the short story, a poster of Billy Connolly on his wall animates into a game show called the 'Cliché Show' and serves to deride the unoriginality of his parents' method of communication. In another sequence, when Sammy's parents are discussing what he should and should not be doing he describes it as a 'duet', before reimagining it as a literal, operatic exchange between them. In this passage, the fantasy is fully developed into several lines illustrating the fantasy in detail. In other instances, the fantasy is only hinted at rather than realized.

In another passage, Sammy imagines the presenters of a children's television programme going into a pub after work and communicating in their onscreen manner. The director has the choice as to how far these fantasies/metaphors are taken. For example, at one point in the short story the narrator explains as Sammy is walking that 'the travelogue didn't happen today'. The travelogue is explained briefly as 'mock American, sometimes fruitily English, sometimes heavily metallic as if it came from another planet' (pp. 170-171). Here, Sammy's explanation of the travelogue, like the operatic voices of Francie Brady in *The Butcher Boy*, seems to impose itself rather than rest under the orchestration of Sammy. In a postcolonial reading, Sammy is both colonised and coloniser in terms of voice. Homi Bhabha's 'mimicry', embodying 'an *ironic* compromise' and representing 'the desire for a

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<sup>60</sup> Petrie, *Screening Scotland*, p. 199.

reformed recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*' illustrates the double bind of Sammy's performance.<sup>61</sup> Not quite one or the Other, 'the slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry ... does not merely "rupture" the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a "partial" presence'. On one hand his act serves as an intervention with the cultural text. However, the inevitable 'partial' nature of the performance disallows complete authority over the discourse.

Even if Sammy is unable to exercise full control over their appearances, he successfully adopts them for his own purposes. Yet this is in no way developed in the same manner that Neil Jordan delineates the disembodied voice of Francie Brady as a key narrative feature. It might be said that the colonization of a particular American psyche might be expressed through irrepressible scenarios such as the Busby Berkeley-inspired number in the sequence at the Bookmaker's parodying the Gangster flick. In addition to the disobedient manner in which Sammy's fantasies surface visually, these imaginings also focus explicitly on language and accent. More specifically, it is the European voice which frequently surfaces in an irrepressible fashion. The pseudo-French accents serve as a ground on which to play out Sammy's vision of inhabiting a Scotland loaded with the radical potential of continental philosophy.

Another particularly subtle use of fantasy occurs after the job interview. Sammy, crossing the street, is described as 'crumpling the application form as he went', before stopping in front of the interview building where he then 'put his cigarette to the fuse of the old-fashioned anarchist's bomb in his hand and threw it into the entrance hall of the building. He heard a tremendous explosion as he walked along the street but he didn't look back' (p. 170). In this sort of passage, the director must decide how literally the language is to be taken. In the film, Sammy does in fact light a bomb outside the council and when he

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<sup>61</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 86.

throws it, the scene cuts to Les Deux Magots' Kilmarnock branch of the famous Parisian café, perhaps hinting at possible alternatives for the anarchic bomb and a potential explosive impact of radical debate circulating within café culture.

Even on a less obvious level, the metaphorical language employed by McIlvanney itself evokes fantasy and contemplation. For instance, when Sammy drifts in and out of fantasy in the opening of the story, waking up to face the prospect of another job interview, he stares in the mirror, wondering whether to shave or not and thinks 'he couldn't be bothered going on safari across his face to find the isolated prickles that were hiding out there' (p. 164). In another passage he imagines an old man to have looked like Robert Duvall when he was younger, who later says to him 'You're all right' in a way Sammy describes as being said 'as if he were bestowing a knighthood' (p. 170). He describes his father as 'a dog barking' (p. 164), 'like a dog that forgets what it was barking about and becomes interested in smells again', and someone who questions 'him like a policeman' (p. 174). Another example is the description of his potential employer as looking 'as if running for a bus would give him cardiac arrest' (p. 167). Hanging out with Pauline (a girl he fancies) and her little sister is 'like having an erection with a padlock on it', or turning his head 'like a lighthouse to see where the danger was' (p. 171). Such suggestive and metaphoric use of language works to reinforce the portrayal of Sammy as a dreamer, taking every opportunity to infuse even the most mundane object or occurrence with fantasy.

While it would be impossible to translate the richness of McIlvanney's metaphoric use of language to the image-based medium of film, through voice-over and clever scripting much of the initial intended effect is retained. Instead of heavily overloading the film with voice-over, reciting the short story in its entirety, other elements of fantasy are developed and reinforced. The casting of Billy Connolly also draws further intertextual references to other media. But these elements of fantasy, as Petrie has argued, exist alongside representations of the cityscape. These moments of fantasy are prefaced by meditations on such hard-hitting realities as the story of a factory worker dying of asbestosis and unable to

get compensation, or descriptions of 'a brown-brick shopping precinct that was looking tatty by the time they finished putting it up, some houses, factories, most of them closed or closing' (p. 167). These depictions of an environment closed to a youth such as the main protagonist urge the need for alternative outlets.

The dichotomy between the reality of Sammy's imagination and the social reality of Scotland in the 1980s is a pivotal device in the short story's socialist message. In the film, however, the divide is further marked by the natural ironic schism between word and image. What is said is rarely what we see. Or is it? In some instances, Sammy's voice-over may work to comically draw attention to the dissonance between word and image, while on the other hand the presence of the commentary may force the viewer to adopt Sammy's romantic 're-visioning' of his world as he would like to imagine it. An example of this working at its best in the film is the 'Les Deux Magots' café sequence.

### **Les Deux Magots, Kilmarnock**

Perhaps one of the most telling sequences of the film is the one in which Sammy creatively re-imagines the local café as the famous Parisian left-bank haven for existentialist philosophers, 'Les Deux Magots'. Reframing his own experience as essentially European, Sammy imagines the inhabitants of his local café engaging in philosophical existentialist debate. This seems to share similar concerns with several other films reflecting upon Scotland's status as a European nation, in addition to, or perhaps rather than being British. Duncan Petrie has made reference to more obvious examples of films which not only reflect upon Scotland but also are actively engaged in pan-European filmmaking practices.<sup>62</sup>

Although McIlvanney's depiction of Sammy's longing for existential debate he associates with European culture is an interesting one, it makes certain assumptions about class in its

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<sup>62</sup> Petrie, *Screening Scotland*, p. 166. The films Petrie offers as specific examples of this are *Prague* and *Over Germany*.

privileging of all things 'European' over the 'local'. While McIlvanney's narrative seems to suggest the connection is at odds with general conceptions of Scottishness, another writer, Janice Galloway, illustrates the opposite when her character Cassie on holiday with her friend Rona in France finds comparisons in the town of Arras with Kilmarnock. Her friend Rona concludes 'Arras had as much right to look like Kilmarnock as Kilmarnock had.'<sup>63</sup>

On a more general level, textually this film seems representative of a preoccupation in Scottish cinema with Scotland's role in Europe. As Petrie points out a 'European dimension of contemporary Scottish identity is forcefully articulated in some recent Scottish films'.<sup>64</sup> Even an unassuming film categorised as 'light comedy', such as *Gregory's Girl* (1980), engages with issues of Scottish identity in relation to Europe. Gregory's increased interest in Italian, although symptomatic of his efforts to impress Dorothy, may also prove demonstrative of Bill Forsyth's appreciation of European culture. Forsyth's understanding of Scottishness is located within Europe rather than Britain. He explains:

We're not Scottish we're Northern European and highly industrialised, developed westerners. Whatever is uniquely Scottish about us would be so difficult to put across in such a crass medium as film that it's not worth the attempt.<sup>65</sup>

So although Bill Forsyth initially denounces the idea of Scottishness entirely, he later qualifies this by explaining that what may be particularly Scottish cannot be portrayed in the medium of film. Although *Gregory's Girl* has often been cited as a film which was successful because of its insistence on the local and a succinct illustration of a particular moment in Scottish culture, it could also be argued that Forsyth's other films, perhaps even his American feature *Housekeeping*, function on a similar level, succeeding in the representation of the specific. This specificity, although occasionally suggestive of a

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<sup>63</sup> Janice Galloway, *Foreign Parts* (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 38.

<sup>64</sup> Petrie, *Screening Scotland*, p. 166.

<sup>65</sup> Alan Hunter, 'Bill Forsyth: The Imperfect Anarchist', Dick (ed.) *From Limelight to Satellite*, pp. 151-162: 161.

European identity, tends to reference essentially Scottish moments in history. If Scottish filmmaking rarely offers unselfconscious representations of 'Europeanness' it is in exchange for mediated, self-conscious reflections on the subject. This is an approach exemplified by the passage in McIlvanney's short story, and even more so by the developments made in the subsequent adaptation.

In the short story, Sammy observes two young men battling over 'the question of free choice in a society founded upon economic inequality' (p. 172) while he sits waiting to see if Albert Camus will come in. When Pauline enters instead, he thinks she looks like Audrey Hepburn in *Roman Holiday* (when they leave, he describes her as Sigourney Weaver in *Ghostbusters*). In the film, although Pauline never arrives, there is a similar level of irony. Opening with Sammy delivering a comic French voice-over, the sequence begins with a pan around the restaurant, revealing an older couple, 'Sartre' and 'Beauvoir', who the narrator reveals 'discuss the existential nature of human relationships'. The camera then pans over to an empty table – the usual seat for 'Camus [who] had failed to turn up'. The film humorously illustrates this newly imagined West Coast/ Left Bank of Scottish culture through associations with the group of philosophers, but this idea of an intellectual culture is furthered and the new medium of film offers additional opportunities to draw on other aspects of French intellectual culture - the film culture of the French New Wave.

In a sequence unique to the film adaptation, Sammy visits Pauline where she is babysitting, and a scenario parodying the experience of art cinema and its relationship to language and culture in Scotland ensues. In an awkward moment, Sammy lies naked in the strange bed like Brigitte Bardot waiting for Pauline, before the frame is frozen and a title unexpectedly appears, changing the projection of the scene from an awkward teen rumble to 'L'Amant', replete with boudoir lounge music. Both Pauline's and Sammy's voices are then dubbed with the much older voices of a man and woman speaking in French. The film is then impulsively subtitled in the characters' Scots dialect. 'Jeez' reads Pauline's dialogue 'Ah'm

still no' sure about this'. 'Ye canny renege now', Sammy replies. The interlude is sharply interrupted when the subtitles and music halt abruptly and Pauline screams 'They're back,' meaning the couple she is babysitting for. A similar technique is also employed in *When Brendan Met Trudy* when the couple's pastiche of *A Bout de Souffle* on the streets of Dublin - replete with French dialogue - is interrupted when a man shouts at them to shut-up. Then, a curious shift takes place, no doubt questioning linguistic centres of power in contemporary Ireland, the couple continues to speak in English, but with Irish subtitles. This moment like the American voice-over commentary or Francie Brady's comic book style narration - provides a sharp contrast between the layering of languages and produces a ventriloquist effect. This self-conscious exposure of the powerful workings of language through ventriloquism has been explored by several Scottish writers.

Perhaps the best known example is Tom Leonard's poem 'The 6 O' Clock News' which, as the title suggests, interrogates the BBC register and reveals what might be lurking behind the notion of 'official' language.<sup>66</sup> Irvine Welsh's short story 'Where the Debris Meets the Sea',<sup>67</sup> adopts a similar approach, but covers the different world of international celebrity. Welsh depicts Kim Basinger, Kylie Minogue, Madonna and Victoria Principal in a California beach house passionately debating the contents of various magazines (*Wide-o*, *Scheme Scene* and *Bevy Merchants*) in a broad Edinburgh accent while they wistfully contemplate the possibility of a holiday in Leith. Welsh achieves a similar effect in 'The Granton Star Cause' when God lashes out at Boab in a torrent of abuse delivered in Scots generously peppered with curses.<sup>68</sup> Another writer, Shug Hanlan, in 'The Supermodel Phone-in', employs a similar technique, merging the world of fashion icons with football. In the style of a football phone-in, Naomi Campbell, Claudia Schiffer, Kate Moss, and Cindy Crawford, are asked questions about the fashion world, to which they reply in

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<sup>66</sup> Tom Leonard, 'The 6 O'clock news', from a 'Unrelated Incidents', *Intimate Voices: Selected Work, 1965-1983* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Galloping Dog Press, 1984), p.88.

<sup>67</sup> Irvine Welsh, 'Where the Debris Meets the Sea', *The Acid House*, pp. 87-92.



Scots.<sup>69</sup> Aside from the humorous effects resulting from the cultural crossovers, these styles of convergence not only 'adopt' the forms of another culture, but are questioning the relationships between the two, in a way perhaps best described by Peter Barry's 'adept' phase alluded to in my discussion of *The Commitments* and the appropriation of Black-American culture.<sup>70</sup>

If one of the risks of adapting McIlvanney for film is losing the political, Alexander's film ensures the risk is minimized by adding several new plot devices to ensure McIlvanney's agenda is clear. Sammy's relationship with his Uncle, a committed socialist who has recently died, serves as a centring device for the narrative not present in the short story. In the cemetery, he walks and reflects on his Uncle's death before he encounters an old man who believes himself to be a Country and Western singer, and prompts a fantasy in which Billy Connolly walks into the frame, performing a number on his banjo. Later in the film, when Sammy walks home down the High Street, passing Marks and Spencers, and recalls his day, he remembers Billy Connolly's words: 'how could you have a revolution here? Who would join?' Sammy's earlier imaginings of the intellectual French café further emphasises the film's expression of the incongruity of politics and place, like Welsh and other Scottish writers reflecting on the complexities of identity. Rather than allow their explorations to be entirely submerged in the culture that is adopted for comparisons, these texts manage successful critiques of both.

Perhaps this is where the most apparent difference between *The Big Man* and *Dreaming* lies. Douglas Gifford asks of *The Big Man*: 'Is this Charles Bronson and *The Streetfighter* translated from Hollywood film to West of Scotland post-industrial hinterland?'<sup>71</sup> This

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<sup>68</sup> Irvine Welsh, 'The Granton Star Cause', *The Acid House*, pp. 120-136.

<sup>69</sup> Shug Hanlan, 'The Supermodel Phone-in', *Hi Bonnybrig and Other Greetings* (Glasgow: 11-9, 2000), pp. 108-112.

<sup>70</sup> Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 195.

<sup>71</sup> Gifford, Dunnigan, and MacGillivray, *Scottish Literature*, p. 867.

representation, Gifford has elsewhere explained, 'betrays the underlying pseudo-romanticism, a too-slick and forced cultural paralleling which no longer discusses Scottish issues for themselves'.<sup>72</sup> Gifford's criticism highlights the superficial nature of the cultural referencing in McIlvanney's narrative which he accuses of diminishing its intended focus on Scottish working-class culture. In *Dreaming* the narration moves beyond simply adopting the culture. The film's retention of Sammy's narration engaged in a negotiation with various cultural texts in sequences like 'Les Deux Magots', ultimately ensures the writer's political intent is not lost.

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<sup>72</sup> Gifford, 'Imagining Scotlands', p. 43.

### 3. Irvine Welsh: *Trainspotting*

Like many other devotees of Scottish cinema, David Bruce sees the passage from 1995-1996 as an important moment in its revival, marking 'the most dynamic period in one hundred years of Scottish film history'.<sup>1</sup> Bruce supports his strong admiration by citing a number of indigenous films alongside films simply set in Scotland and mirrors the high levels of enthusiasm shared by other critics, for *Trainspotting* and *Shallow Grave*. These films Duncan Petrie has described as having 'had little direct connections with established cinematic or televisual traditions, rejecting both Celtic romanticism and naturalistic grit'<sup>2</sup> and resisting the 'raw male Celtic physicality epitomised in 1995 by *Rob Roy* and *Braveheart*'.<sup>3</sup> Other critics insist on examining the films not only in terms of a 'New Scottish Cinema' but in terms of moving the periphery of a National British Cinema away from an anglocentric establishment towards a more heterogeneous post-national cinema.<sup>4</sup> Following this analysis, films falling under 'New Scottish Cinema', such as *My Name is Joe* (Ken Loach, 1998), or *Trainspotting*, certainly seem to offer a post-national British cinema, or at least, as Andrew Higson writes, 'a more ambivalent image of contemporary Britain'.<sup>5</sup>

*Trainspotting* in particular provides the opportunity for an interesting insight into this re-imagining of national cinemas. Irvine Welsh's novel received mixed reviews, but made a great impact. Some enthusiasts trumpeted it as the most important book in the history of

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<sup>1</sup> David Bruce, *Scotland: The Movie* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Petrie, *Screening Scotland*, p. 196. Petrie is discussing 'New Scottish Cinema' with particular reference to *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting*.

<sup>3</sup> Petrie, *Screening Scotland*, p. 62.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Higson explores this shift in his essay 'The Instability of the National', pp. 35-47.

<sup>5</sup> Higson, 'The Instability of the National', p. 38.

literature.<sup>6</sup> In paperback alone, it has sold over one million copies. The film was equally successful, breaking box-office records, as the 'second biggest homegrown box-office success in British film history',<sup>7</sup> overcoming the pull of Hollywood at the UK box-office.<sup>8</sup> The text's great success in either form begs the question: which came first and had the greatest impact, film or novel? There is some difficulty in determining which medium, if either, developed its own success on the back of the other, or if the relationship formed was more symbiotic. Christopher Harvie leans in favour of the film, claiming that Welsh's creation *'Trainspotting* (thanks largely to Danny Boyle's film) became the tenth most important book, the 1996 papers said, since books started.<sup>9</sup> Certainly Welsh's readership was greater after the release of the film – still, he had sold over 100,000 copies prior to the film's release – even so, the end-results yielded from each is certain to have propelled the other's success.

When asked if he accredited his popularity in the US to the film and if he liked the adaptation, Welsh replied: 'It certainly didn't do me any harm, and because of that, I have to love it.'<sup>10</sup> Welsh's novel stretches further to interrogate notions of literature, and in effect challenge the defining characteristics of the novel. Long-listed for the Booker prize, the schematic assortment of characters, provoked questions as to its status as a novel, rather than a collection of short stories. If the novel is the defining instrument of national identity then Welsh's work must interrogate this function through his deconstructive approach. Even more so, a film made from this generically slippery text becomes riddled with questions concerning its role in a 'New Scottish Cinema' or 'Post-National British Cinema'.

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<sup>6</sup> Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg Ltd, 1993). All subsequent references will be to this edition.

<sup>7</sup> Bert Cardullo, 'Fiction into Film, Bringing Welsh to a Boyle', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1997, pp. 155-162: 158

<sup>8</sup> Ralf Ludeman, 'International Box Office Comment', *Screen International*, 27 September 1996, p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes*, p. 177.

In 1994, before the novel was turned into the film, playwright Harry Gibson produced a highly acclaimed stage adaptation which resulted in sold-out performances internationally. The production marked the beginning of the series of plays adapted by Gibson from Welsh's novels. To varying levels of acclaim, Gibson went on to create theatrical versions of *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (1996), *Filth* (1999), and *Glue* (2001). It was with the first play, however, that Gibson encountered difficulties adapting Welsh's novel for the stage. Even though Welsh had already worked collaboratively on *Headstate* (a Boilerhouse Theatre Company production) in 1994, and would go on to script his original play, *You'll Have Had Your Hole* in 1998, Gibson has remarked on the obstacle posed by Welsh's belief that 'theatre is bourgeois shite'<sup>11</sup> (or 'middle-class wank' as the author has stated elsewhere).<sup>12</sup>

Ironically, it was the theatre's lack of censorship that drew Gibson to it as a medium for his particular adaptation in the first place. As Gibson explained, although he was asked by the BBC to do a radio play, he was quickly turned away: 'once they realised that landing on "Planet Trainspotting" means you can't walk for two lines without bumping into a cunt, they bottled'.<sup>13</sup> Even if Welsh's well-publicized affinity with the medium of film may be reflected in his reference to theatre as 'bourgeois shite', and may further suggest his belief that film is the more dynamic and radical medium, this is often challenged by critics' praise of the theatrical version's commitment to taking the most risks. As Chris Mitchell argues in his article for the online forum, *Spike Magazine*, 'the play has been the most extreme of *Trainspotting's* three incarnations, its profanity and violence sending shockwaves through the theatre circuit'.<sup>14</sup> The impact of this first adaptation of Welsh's text is often overlooked

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<sup>10</sup> 'Web Chat with Irvine Welsh', from [www3.sympatico.co/simsg/wpchat.htm](http://www3.sympatico.co/simsg/wpchat.htm), n.pag.

<sup>11</sup> Chris Mitchell, 'Expletives Repeated', from [www.spikemagazine.com/0997spot.htm](http://www.spikemagazine.com/0997spot.htm), n.pag.

<sup>12</sup> Joe McAvoy, 'Now the Drugs Don't Work', *Cencrastus*, no. 60, 1998, pp. 12-14.

<sup>13</sup> Mitchell, 'Expletives Repeated', n.pag.

<sup>14</sup> Mitchell, 'Expletives Repeated', n.pag.

in favour of the popular, cinematic version, and accordingly, its influence on the latter version is undermined. Without a doubt, the theatrical incarnation of Welsh's text paved the way for its development into a film, cementing confidence in the possibilities of its viability in an international market.

In addition to the play's impact and subsequent influence on the success of the film version, cinematic success is also attributed to the good fortune of its release on the coattails of such well-received films as *Shallow Grave*, *Braveheart*, and *Rob Roy* - apparently disparate films which served the same purpose in countering a wave of British heritage films and opening up fixed constructs of British national identity. This agenda was taken up by Welsh who characterises the heritage industry as false representation driven by tourism and valued by the local economy: 'Tourists want to come to the Athens of the North rather the HIV capital of Europe'.<sup>15</sup> Welsh's fiction positions itself awkwardly against this tendency to value literary success in terms of its promotion of Scotland as an international tourist destination.

### ***Delineating a national cinema and re-writing old stereotypes***

In a recent article applying Kristeva's theories of the abject and Homi Bhabha's theory of postcolonial hybridity to the construction of identities in *Trainspotting*, Patricia Horton argues for the potentially subversive nature of the figuring and re-figuring of identities performed and enacted by the novel's characters. Using the novel's cover featuring two masked characters as a trope, Horton argues the 'novel's deeper concern with identities and their constructedness'.<sup>16</sup> It seems logical that a novel which has come to express so much in terms of the hybridity of national identity should have at its roots a concern with individual identity. It is a motif which Horton argues may be associated with other topoi in

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<sup>15</sup> Irvine Welsh, 'Drugs and the Theatre, Darlings', in *Trainspotting and Headstate (Playscripts)* (London: Minerva, 1996), p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Patricia Horton, 'Trainspotting: A Topography of the Masculine Abject', *English*, no. 50, Autumn 2001, pp. 219-234: 220.

Scottish literature. For example, themes identified and peppered throughout Scottish literary criticism such as 'duality', 'division', and 'fracture', Horton points out have been read as negative expressions, but may be reframed as representative of a hybrid, active interpretation of identity present in contemporary Scotland.

When Andrew Higson suggests that *Trainspotting* represents a new 'ambivalent' vision of Britain and a shift from 'homogony to heterogony' he is assuming particular notions of British identity, distinct from a new 'Scottish' cinema. In line with John Hill's observations of films in the 1980s such as *Gregory's Girl* offering an alternative view of 'Britain', Higson identifies *Trainspotting* as providing relief from dominant modes of representation, namely the heritage film. For Higson, heritage films are defined not only by their 'Englishness', but by their homogenised vision of England. Likewise, Hill suggests films such as *Gregory's Girl* offers a marked contrast to *Chariots of Fire* (Hugh Hudson, 1981), and denotes an opening up of the definition of British national cinema to more varied illustrations.<sup>17</sup>

Representations of Scotland in film existed before this development of a 'post-national British cinema'. However, because British Cinema appropriated a limited sphere of representations of solely 'Englishness', few indigenous films fell under the categorisation of 'British' cinema, leaving only those films originating in England to represent Scotland.<sup>18</sup> Alternatively, Hollywood offered its own loose representations consisting of films with Scotland as their backdrop, or films with Scotland as their subject matter.<sup>19</sup> Although it is

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<sup>17</sup> Hill, 'British Cinema as National Cinema', p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> Ealing films such as the two by American-born Scottish director, Alexander Mackendrick, *The Maggie* (1954) and *Whisky Galore!* served this function. Charles Crichton's *Battle of the Sexes* (1959), in which a US business woman battles against dated Edinburgh business practices firmly rooted in the past, and John Eldridge's *Laxdale Hall* (1952), in which members of parliament are forced to visit with a Highland community protesting the state of their roads, similarly examine Scotland through an outside perspective. Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *The Edge of the World* (1937) and *I Know Where I'm Going* (1989) might also be seen in this light.

<sup>19</sup> See *Annie Laurie* (Robertson, MGM, 1927), *The Little Minister* (Wallace, RKO, 1934), *Mary of Scotland* (Ford, RKO, 1936), *Quality Street* (Stevens, RKO, 1937), *Rulers of the Sea* (Lloyd, Paramount, 1939), *Vigil in the Night* (Stevens, RKO, 1939), *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*

unfair to say that romanticised representations of Scotland only developed from outside, by outsiders, the importance and development of a 'National Cinema' aims to counter a certain set of myths which many of these films perpetuate – although indigenous films could also be guilty of this -, and a large focus has rested on the development of new strategies of representation. A similar concern with who represents Scotland has also been a major focus in literature.

Before *Trainspotting* the movie was cited as emblematic of the beginnings of a new Scottish cinema, *Trainspotting* the novel was heralded as an innovative new voice in Scottish literature. The novel had a profound effect on many creative sectors in Scotland, including cinema and theatre. Novelist Laura Hird has recently remarked on the importance of Welsh's novel, explaining how:

The success of *Trainspotting* also seemed to kickstart a resurgence and much needed broadening of film and television drama set in Scotland, breaking the quirky Glasgow/hard-man Glasgow monopoly that has continually represented the country for so long, yet is just one toaty sector of a wildly diverse culture.<sup>20</sup>

Hird's explanation is reflective of the dominant concern held by writers and artists over the narrative representation of Scotland. As Christopher Harvie has observed, films such as *The Edge of the World*, *The Shipbuilders*, *Whisky Galore!*, *I Know Where I'm Going*, *The Maggie*, *The Brave Don't Cry* (Philip Leacock, 1952), and many others indigenous and not, testify to the medium's concerted attempt to wrestle with what he refers to as the 'condition of Scotland question', but he is also quick to conclude that these films bear similarities to the literature that preceded them.<sup>21</sup> *Trainspotting*, and what it did for the promotion of new representations of Scotland on film, was in many ways parallel to the engagement with the

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(Werker, Twentieth Century Fox, 1939), *The Green Years* (Saville, MGM, 1946), *Challenge to Lassie* (Thorpe, MGM 1949), *Peter Pan* (Jackson, Disney 1952), *Ivanhoe* (Thorpe, MGM, 1952), *The Master of Ballantrae* (Keighley, 1953, Warner Brothers), *Brigadoon* (Minnelli, MGM, 1954), *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (Levin, Twentieth Century Fox, 1959), *Kidnapped* (Stevenson, Disney 1960), *Greyfriar's Bobby* (Chaffey, Disney, 1961).

<sup>20</sup> Doug Johnstone, 'Irvinespotting', *The List*, 15-29 March 2001, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes*, p.140.



identity in Scottish Literature that was set in motion almost two decades earlier, when hot on the heels of disappointment at devolution's failure, writers such as James Kelman and Alasdair Gray self-assuredly explored issues of identity.

***'Mine own romantic town!' Trainspotting and the mythologizing of Edinburgh***

Every writer must negotiate their literary context and the culture from which they write.

According to Dorothy McMillan, 'for contemporary Scottish novelists, the nation, its myths and allegories, however monstrous, are probably inescapable'.<sup>22</sup> In a panel on BBC4's *Readers and Writers Roadshow* in Edinburgh, Alan Warner and Irvine Welsh were asked if they were attempting to rewrite the literary myths of Scotland or rewrite Scotland, like Spud in Welsh's latest offering, *Porno*, who attempts to rewrite the history of Leith so that its invisible history gets the recognition he feels it deserves.<sup>23</sup> The question uncannily mirrors the argument posed in Cristie L. March's book entitled *Rewriting Scotland* which marks the writer's act as a form of direct intervention with previous representations. Surprisingly, Warner and Welsh deny playing any role in renegotiating existing representations and rather modestly propose to be offering only their own version of contemporary Scottish life. Welsh explains: 'I don't want to establish this great hegemony over all other kinds of writing. I just want that to be represented. I want a lot of things to be represented in literature as well. We've got a multi-cultural world, let's have multi-cultural art.' Warner's remarks suggested more of a vested interest in the past: 'What has Walter Scott got to do with Renton? That has to be taken into consideration.' What Warner's comment hints at is the reality that whether it is intended or not, contemporary writing is impossible to separate from its context in Scottish literature and its reading against or beside previous representation.

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<sup>22</sup> Dorothy McMillan, 'Constructed Out of Bewilderment: Stories of Scotland', in Ian A. Bell (ed.), *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), pp. 80-99: 81.

<sup>23</sup> BBC4, 'Readers and Writers Roadshow', Edinburgh International Book Festival, 24 August 2002.

The contradictory relationship between *Trainspotting* and earlier representations associated with the 'tartan monster', thoroughly detailed in Colin McArthur's influential *Scotch Reels*, may be illustrated further and more specifically in the opening sequences of *Trainspotting*. The film mirrors the earlier 'tartan' films Colin McArthur has noted as characteristically opening with a Scottish song, a shot of lochs and bens, alongside what McArthur says is crucial, the opening voice-over narration, a tendency that may be seen as originating with the work of Sir Walter Scott. In *Marmion: A Tale of Flodden*, Scott depicts the 'gloomy splendor' of Edinburgh in an appreciative barrage of description, culminating in the author proclaiming it as 'mine own romantic town!'<sup>24</sup> Not unlike Scott, or subsequent representations of Scotland on film, *Trainspotting* fetishises the landscape, opening with the image of Renton running down Edinburgh's Princes street, dominated by the driving rhythm of Iggy Pop's 'Lust for Life', and coupled with Renton's voice-over narration.<sup>25</sup> This energetic opening introduces us to the character whose world we will inhabit for the remainder of the film, but more importantly it establishes another component of the film rivalling for celebrity: the cityscape.

In a fashion not altogether dissimilar from the techniques employed in the films McArthur is referring to, *Trainspotting* fixates itself on the landscapes of Edinburgh (ironically, much of it was shot in Possil). Throughout the film, visual parodies of other national myths abound. Many of the London sequences are parodies of other images of London from popular culture, such as the opening sequence to a *Hard Day's Night* (Richard Lester, 1964). The Highland myth is parodied throughout Renton's 'It's Shite being Scottish' speech. The long shots that are employed serve to further emphasise the distanced feelings Renton expresses. What seems a familiar nostalgic shot of Scottish hills is quickly subverted once it is re-framed within the narrative context by introducing the figures of

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<sup>24</sup> Sir Walter Scott, *Marmion* (Oxford, 1889), IV: XXX, p. 18.

<sup>25</sup> Colin McArthur, 'Scotland and Cinema: The Iniquity of the Fathers', in McArthur (ed.) *Scotch Reels*, p. 59.

Renton and his friends. It is important that this takes place within the cinematic landscape of Scotland, more familiar to *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy*, and functioning within the 'kailyard',<sup>26</sup> outside both the space and time of the narrative frame of the addict's life in Edinburgh. Willy Maley and Ellen-Raïssa Jackson describe the speech as illustrative of 'the masculinist discourse of colonialism (the shame is that Scotland's conquerors are "effete," thus further undermining the masculinity of the Scots)'.<sup>27</sup> Murray Smith has referred to this sequence as being described as 'ironic heritage', or a divide 'between what has rapidly coalesced as "traditional" heritage culture, and a more sceptical and ironic practice which both appeals to notions of cultural heritage while also mocking them for their anodyne character, their "cultural racism" or their downright falsity'.<sup>28</sup> These parodies bring into question the notion of representation. When considering the opening sequence, it is difficult to regard it in the same light. The film presents Edinburgh as a different representation from 'tartan' films, but one that is not dissimilar in style and function. Ultimately, the juxtaposition of Renton's voice-over with the musical track 'Lust for Life' re-frames Edinburgh within its own myth.

Recent developments in literary and cultural studies have called for, not simply the discovery of a more 'authentic' Scotland, but the acceptance of plural 'Scotlands'. In *Scott and Scotland* (1936), Edwin Muir had warned that Scots dialect was only capable of representing Scotland 'in bits and patches', as 'divided' rather than as a whole. Muir feared that dialect would condemn Scotland to 'remain a mere collection of districts'.<sup>29</sup> More recently and optimistically, Willy Maley has argued for the advantage of disjunctive representation, reasoning that 'Scotland is best laid out in schemes rather than gathered

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<sup>26</sup> Willy Maley, 'Braveheart: Raising the Stakes of History', *Irish Review*, no. 22, 1998, pp. 67-79: 79.

<sup>27</sup> Ellen-Raïssa Jackson and Willy Maley, 'Birds of a Feather?: A Postcolonial Reading of Irvine Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares*', *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, no. 41, 2000, pp. 187-196: 189.

<sup>28</sup> Murray Smith, *Trainspotting* (London: BFI, 2002), p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland* (London: Routledge, 1936), p. 71.

under one national heading.<sup>30</sup> Even if, as Laura Hird's remarks suggest, new representations are welcomed to breathe new life into time-worn representations, one myth would never replace the whole. Rather each new representation exists as one of many, never neatly composing a complete picture, and resisting fixed representation, in favour of the ongoing process of more fluid and multiple representations.

Sarah Street has also identified *Trainspotting* as a film which sought to challenge the pre-existent representations of 'Britishness' beyond 'the sumptuous hues of heritage', but also offered a view of 'the "other Scotland" from the Edinburgh festival'.<sup>31</sup> What Street identifies here is the importance of the film as signalling a shift in representation in British cinema, but also reformulating representations within Scotland, and additionally affecting many different modes of representation at the same time (i.e., literature, drama, cinema). Irvine Welsh has explained *Trainspotting*'s role in British Cinema and the general public's tiring of existing representations and films such as *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and the necessity for real people to be portrayed.<sup>32</sup> Welsh's positing of his own texts against the successful British film was evident while he was working on the play script for *Headstate* and his explanation of his desire to create 'the antithesis of the ugly, smug, bland *Four Weddings and a Funeral* style middle-class escapism which hilariously passes as "art" today'.<sup>33</sup>

Welsh's comments on contemporary British cinema recalls Beveridge and Turnbull's critique of tartanry in 1980. This representation they condemn for mystifying culture and preventing 'Scots from seeing themselves, their history and social reality with any clarity', as exemplified by Lindsay Paterson's description of it as an 'opiate' to the masses - or as

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<sup>30</sup> Willy Maley, 'Subversion and Squirrility in Irvine Welsh's Shorter Fiction', in Dermot Cavanagh and Tim Kirk (eds.), *Subversion and Scurrility: Popular Discourse in Europe from 1500 to the Present* (London: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 190-204: 191.

<sup>31</sup> Street, *British National Cinema*, p. 111.

<sup>32</sup> John Hodge, *Trainspotting: The Screenplay* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p. 118.

<sup>33</sup> Irvine Welsh, 'Drugs and the Theatre, Darlings', p. 1.

Beveridge and Turnbull further articulate – an 'ideal compensation for material deprivation'.<sup>34</sup> The formation of *one* identity functions as a clear, unifying principle, guaranteeing the sublimation of other forms of representation, but nevertheless offering a form of mollification. Welsh's dislike of 'middle-class escapism' further echoes Renton's aversion to the pacifying nature of capitalism. Rather than escaping material deprivation through tartanry Renton chooses heroin to break away from the oppression of capitalism. Rather than choose tartanry, kailyard, urban gritty realism or hardman mythology, Welsh chooses something different. He chooses a story about heroin, received with criticism by some for its glamorous portrait of a condemned subject, but an alternative to the choice of previous representations. Welsh's decision to represent what some thought to be unrepresentable is crucial in the move away from limited representations of Scottish literature and cinema. As his comments at the *Readers and Writers Roadshow* suggest, his foremost objective is to represent what he feels necessary rather than be tied to an engagement with previous representations.

### ***Welsh and film***

*Trainspotting* signalled a shift in filmmaking in Scotland as well as contemporary Scottish Literature, but it can hardly be said that the film marked the *beginning* of this shift, since other films preceding it sparked similar debate. As a novel, *Trainspotting* became emblematic of an increasing link between contemporary writing and the cinema. Novels reflective of the style and/or structure of cinema have often been criticised for being unsophisticated or 'unliterary'.

*Trainspotting* has been criticised for its divergence from traditional literary practices, and in turn has had its status as 'novel' denied because of its inability to conform to previous assumptions about what constitutes a 'novel'. John Hodge, the screenwriter for *Trainspotting*, expressed his own concern about adapting it by explaining how Welsh's text

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<sup>34</sup> Beveridge and Turnbull, *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture*, p. 13. Citing Lindsay Paterson 'Scotch

'wasn't really conceived as a novel, and there really isn't much narrative structure'.<sup>35</sup>

Hodge's remarks suggest that had Welsh's book been more of a 'traditional' novel, stylistically and structurally, his task of creating a film script from the material would have been made significantly easier. Welsh himself has said he didn't see it as a film because of its episodic quality and lack of a strong narrative.<sup>36</sup> Conversely, although the film's producer, Andrew MacDonald, has expressed his own feeling that the best films are wholly original, he explains his decision to work on *Trainspotting* as down to the fact that it *was* 'different, because it wasn't really a novel'.<sup>37</sup>

Ironically, the second film to be developed from Welsh's material, *The Acid House*, was accused by one reviewer of not being 'even really a movie', and perhaps because of its own structuring into three divergent narratives the reviewer dislikes its presence outside traditional narrative film structure and concludes that it is 'a minimally bound trio of small-screen one-liners'.<sup>38</sup> This preoccupation with 'traditional' narrative structures bears an uncanny resemblance to the criticism of Welsh's 'novel' and further signals the inter-textual relations between contemporary writing and film. It may not be a concern with what is acceptable and expected of film, or likewise, what demonstrates a literary quality, but more fundamentally represents discomfort with the abandonment of classical narrative forms.

Willy Maley has justified *Trainspotting*'s reception as a novel as down 'to a new "postmodern" sensibility that no longer looks to the novel as a reassuring site of unity and

Myths', *Bulletin of Scottish Politics*, vol. 1, no. 2, Spring 1981.

<sup>35</sup> Angus Finney (ed.) *The State of European Cinema: A New Dose of Reality* (London and New York: Cassell, 1996), p. 175.

<sup>36</sup> Hodge, *Trainspotting: The Screenplay*, p. 118.

<sup>37</sup> Finney, *The State of European Cinema*, p. 174.

<sup>38</sup> Seb Hinde, 'The Acid House', *Neon*, January 1999, p.84. *The Acid House* (1999), released three years after the successes of *Trainspotting*, was directed by the well-respected documentarist, Paul McGuigan, and was scripted by Welsh himself. The first short-story to be screened of the adapted trilogy was 'The Granton Star Cause', produced by Picture Palace North and Umbrella Films as a short film for Channel 4 in 1997, winning two Royal Television Society awards, and a BAFTA for best single drama. The success of the short film ensured the remaining two films would follow, produced and funded in the same manner.

cohesion'.<sup>39</sup> In many ways, the refusal to look beyond 'classical' structure is seen in both the criticism of film and literature as a resistance characterised by its criticism of new forms which re-negotiate what might be thought of as 'absolute truths' specific to a particular medium. In an article in *The New York Times*, aptly titled 'Quick Cuts: The Novel Follows Film Into a World with Fewer Words', E.L. Doctorow, reflecting on the film's influence on literature observes how the 'effect of a hundred years of filmmaking on the practice of literature has been considerable'.<sup>40</sup> Not only are the 'effects' of contemporary fiction testament to the young medium's influence on the elder, but there is a growing trend of contemporary writers claiming their influence from film.

Never an avid book reader, Irvine Welsh cites film and television as his major influences.<sup>41</sup> After *Trainspotting*, Welsh wrote the screenplay for *Acid House* and has also scripted *Some Weird Sin*, a follow-up to *Trainspotting* based on the novella from *The Acid House*, 'A Smart Cunt', currently under development with Picture Palace Productions. In an interview with Kevin Williamson for Welsh's first publisher *Rebel Inc.*, entitled 'The Ecstasy Interview', Irvine Welsh demonstrates a lack of belief in the novel as a significant influence on society when he says 'I don't think there's been one significant fucking novel that's ever advanced the human condition.'<sup>42</sup> Expressing his doubt about the novel's cultural capacity, more to the point Welsh here articulates feelings of the failure of previous authors to develop the medium in a meaningful and productive way. Welsh cites his influences as film, but a particular kind of film: 'Tacky kind of films, like. Mass explosions. These kind of bottom end of the market films.'<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Maley, 'Subversion and Squirrility', p. 192.

<sup>40</sup> E.L. Doctorow, 'Quick Cuts: The Novel Follows Film Into a World of Fewer Words', *The New York Times*, 15 March 1999, section B, p. 1 and 7: 1.

<sup>41</sup> See Steve Redhead's interview with Welsh, 'Post-punk Junk', in *Repetitive Beat Generation*, pp. 136-150.

<sup>42</sup> Kevin Williamson, 'The Ecstasy Interview - Irvine Welsh', *Rebel Inc. Magazine*, no. 4, 1993, p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Williamson, 'The Ecstasy Interview', p. 13.

The influence of film on his writing is certain, and not just necessary in this specific instance to display a marked irreverence for the medium in which he chooses to express himself. The influence of film on the writer is evident in his style, and has also been commented on more seriously in other interviews with the author. An interview with Welsh conducted by the screenwriter/adaptor John Hodge, in the published version of the screenplay, reveals Welsh's own perception of films such as *Shallow Grave* as being connected with modern writing.<sup>44</sup> Welsh distances himself from literature and instead identifies with contemporary cinema. *Trainspotting*'s success in the medium and the *Shallow Grave* team's decision to take it on serves as further proof of a contemporary crossover between cinema and fiction.

In addition to becoming influential on the club circuit, the release of new fiction by Welsh prompts speculation as to its filmic potential. Even novels Welsh views as unsuitable for adaptation are considered ripe for adaptation. In addition to *Trainspotting* and *The Acid House*, *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, *Ecstasy*, *Filth*, and even Welsh's play *You'll Have Had Your Hole* have been considered at various stages. Still, Welsh cautions against adapting all of his work: 'I just don't like the idea that something should be made into a film because it's a book. I'd have to be really convinced that the people who were doing it were right.'<sup>45</sup> Most recently Mark Cousins, film critic and member of production company 4Way Pictures, for whom Welsh is writing an original film script, explained his interest in adapting Welsh's latest offering as reaching further than just issues of money: 'Of course there is interest in *Porno* because Irvine writes in such a cinematic way and any of his books are particularly suited to the screen.'<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Hodge, *Trainspotting: The Screenplay*, p. 120.

<sup>45</sup> Redhead, *Repetitive Beat Generation*, pp. 141-142.

<sup>46</sup> Phil Miller, 'Back to the Tracks as Welsh's Trainspotters Turn to Porn', *The Herald* (Glasgow), 10 August 2002, p. 4.



### *Intertextuality*

*Trainspotting* and *Sense and Sensibility*, as suggested by the critic who coined the terms 'Trainspotters' and 'Janespotters', each offer their own representation of the nation. In terms of adaptation, each film demonstrates a rather different relationship to their original source, even to literature in general. Unlike the irreverent view towards literature taken up by Welsh, Jane Austen's works are emblematic of an altogether different cultural placement of literature. Although Austen is not regarded as writing specifically with a high degree of reverence towards classical literature in the opposite way to which Welsh denigrates it, Austen's function in contemporary popular culture, serves as a reminder of the important place held by literature in the formation of national identity. The concerted attempts of Emma Thompson to translate Austen to the screen over a period of five years, elaborated on in her published script and diaries, coupled with the detailed fashion with which Ang Lee directs Thompson's screenplay, is illustrative of the degree of reverence with which the task of translating Austen to screen is regarded.<sup>47</sup> Even though Thompson's screenplay refigures Austen's novel, it would be difficult to imagine the film tied as firmly to contemporary culture as *Trainspotting*.

*Trainspotting* pays homage not only to its source, but the culture in which it is submerged. In a review in *Sight and Sound*, Phillip Kemp argues that the 'film moves with the rhythm and energy of the fractured, street level junk culture it portrays and even celebrates'.<sup>48</sup> This may be seen as evidenced in the marketing of the film and its many tie-ins. *Sense and Sensibility* may have had the screenplay and diaries, but *Trainspotting* had the screenplay, soundtrack, and the posters, often distributed at university orientation programs.

*Trainspotting*, as enunciated in Welsh's previous comments, had more in common with influential filmmaking practices than literature. Frequently compared with Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (a film the filmmakers claim as a source of inspiration), *Shallow*

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<sup>47</sup> See Emma Thompson, *Sense and Sensibility: The Screenplay & Diaries: Bringing Jane Austen's Novel to Film* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995).

*Grave*, or, as Geoff Brown has suggested, *The Young Americans* (Danny Cannon, 1993) or *Shopping* (Paul W. S. Anderson, 1994), the film is closely bound to popular youth culture. Murray Smith, in his recent study of the film, has pointed to numerous filmic references, including, *Mean Streets* (Martin Scorsese, 1973), in the sequence which introduces the characters with subtitles, *The Hustler* (Robert Rossen, 1961), because Begbie identifies with the character played by Paul Newman in the film, and of course, Sick Boy and his attachment to Sean Connery/James Bond. The effect, as one critic writes, appeals to 'young audiences whose natural film language is American, not British, and whose God is Quentin Tarantino'.<sup>49</sup> Outside of representations of British cinema associated with films such as *Sense and Sensibility*, perhaps outside 'the national' entirely, the film seems more a component of not simply youth culture, but new cinema. This is a new cinema that Welsh was quick to point out literature follows quite closely, and likewise locates importance in the referencing of films as well as music and club culture. A recent re-release of *Trainspotting* in Germany as a double-bill alongside the phenomenally popular film *Run Lola Run* (Tom Twkwer, 1998) signals this convergence in film, as well as the acceptance of a new cinematic style rooted in youth culture.

*Trainspotting* has been dissected to reveal its many references to popular culture. From the opening tableau in which the characters are introduced in freeze frame, to a scene such as their arrival in London, the film has been related to popular music, 1950s films, and many other genres. Certainly the film draws on many forms and a great degree of its success relied upon the sensation of exhilaration that was generated by the bombardment of various images and sounds. While these endless representations satisfy the spectator with their identification, they may also serve as a distancing device from the characters themselves. Willy Maley has referred to Welsh's treatment of the darker elements of drug culture as

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<sup>48</sup> Phillip Kemp, 'Trainspotting', *Sight and Sound*, March 1996, pp. 52-53.

<sup>49</sup> Geoff Brown, 'Paradise Found and Lost: The Course of British Realism', in Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book* (London: BFI, 1997), pp. 187-197: 196.

dealt with 'directly in a manner so cool and dispassionate as to seem cold and distant'.<sup>50</sup>

This may in fact be the point of contention which generated much criticism of Welsh's fiction - not that he sympathises with the characters but that he seems to not care at all. In a similar way, the film may use the many intertextual layers to distance itself to a degree that a more traditional realist film would never be capable of, nor allow. Instead of portraying the narrative events in as realistic manner as possible, the true horror of reality is framed behind the safe confines of popular culture. The technique neither glorifies nor abhors its subject, but creates a tension between its subject matter, questioning previous representations.

### ***Process***

If literature is at risk of becoming lost in the process of adaptation from page to screen, as language gives up its precedence to the image (and sound), *Trainspotting* seems even more likely to lose the importance of language at the mercy of the dominant presence of the soundtrack. E. L. Doctorow has remarked that while ninety-five percent of meaning is projected without language, solely through the image, music lessens the necessity for words, accounting, in Doctorow's mind, for only 3 percent of meaning.<sup>51</sup> When considering the impact of music on a film like *Trainspotting* it is difficult not to imagine the percentage of meaning relayed through music and image rising even higher. Still, the lack of dependence on words does not necessarily imply the film's independence from its literary origins. It is important to remember that although reliant on words, meaning in the novel is not always implied as dialogue; sometimes the meaning is evoked through the depiction of an image, while at other times meaning may be produced through other senses such as sound. Irvine Welsh's novel seems to evoke a soundtrack throughout by frequent referencing of various songs and music artists. Still, in *Trainspotting* the dominance of the soundtrack serves to intensify the delivery of the narrative, allowing meaning to be relayed

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<sup>50</sup> Maley, 'Subversion and Squirrility', p. 198.

in several channels at once, creating the effect of being bombarded with meaning and producing the resulting sensation of narrative rapidity.

In the introduction to his screenplay, John Hodge has expressed difficulty adapting Welsh's internal novel. The multi-narrative, multi-voiced text, narrated by plainly defined and well-developed characters, was looked on as a challenge by its adaptor. In the end, Hodge opted for the now familiar feature that characterised the film for its spectators - the voice-over. Hodge admittedly sees the employment of voice-over for Renton's narration as a transgression against the text, even though the opening voice-over sequence is taken almost word for word from Welsh, because he feels the device singles out Renton as the text's narrator.

The novel consisted of a series of vignettes, sometimes in third person, but more often told in first person through the voice of one of the many characters. Some have suggested this narrational style would have lent itself better to a structure similar to *Short Cuts* (Robert Altman 1993).<sup>52</sup> Although the narration is divided amongst all the characters, Renton comes to the forefront of the text because of the frequency with which he narrates. Danny Boyle has admitted that Renton was chosen as the focus of the film simply because 'his story had an ending whereas nobody else's had'.<sup>53</sup> While some characters are *never* privy to first-person narration, Renton appears several times in the first-person, and becomes a reference point within the narrative, weaving in and out of the story and serving as a marker of the narrative's progression.

The film's depiction of the novel's intimate first-person narration through only one of Welsh's characters led many to feel that the translation from book to film, as Sarah Street has claimed, resulted in a shift from the story of many characters to being solely Renton's

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<sup>51</sup> Doctorow, 'Quick Cuts', p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> Keith Hopper, 'Trainspotting: The Choice of a New Generation' (Interview with Danny Boyle), *Film West*, no. 24, 1996, pp. 10-14.

story.<sup>54</sup> Even if the use of first-person narration in the novel might imply that each character plays an equally influential role in the delivery of the story, Renton's voice-over in the film hardly eliminates the quality the vignettes have to clearly identify each character. Instead, the voice-over acts as a device which signals its origins in Welsh's novel, in addition to adding a degree of continuity to the fragmented quality of the story, a quality its producer foresaw as an obstacle to adaptation.<sup>55</sup>

In the end, the fragmented quality of Welsh's fiction enabled the filmmakers to easily shuffle the 'short stories' into what might be considered a classical narrative structure. The film begins from the middle of the book, and forms a rather linear structure out of Renton's struggle to give up drugs. In common with many other adaptations, certain characters are condensed, including the female characters who become Kelly MacDonald's film character, Dianne. A few of the male characters converge into the screen narrative of Ewen Bremner's character, Spud, and various scenes or strands of the narrative are lost. Welsh still claims he can't say 'they've ruined his book'. Different from the typical objections to screen versions of novels, Welsh overlooks the many alterations to his novel, and instead expresses pleasure in the filmmakers' resistance to interpreting the novel through social realist lenses.<sup>56</sup>

### ***Voice in Trainspotting: the sight and sound of f\*\*\* on screen***

The consideration of fidelity in relation to adaptation becomes something altogether different when looking at Irvine Welsh. Fidelity here still means a degree of reverence to the original text, or a commitment to an idea of 'inherent meaning', but rather than being representative of a value-based criteria, it becomes a balancing act the adaptor must

<sup>53</sup> Keith Hopper, 'Trainspotting', pp. 10-14.

<sup>54</sup> Street, 'Trainspotting', p. 185.

<sup>55</sup> John Hodge explained in the Introduction to the screenplay how voice-overs for Begbie and Tommy were originally scripted, but later cut. See Hodge, *Trainspotting*, p. 24.

<sup>56</sup> Andrew MacDonald 'Interview with Irvine Welsh', *Trainspotting: The Screenplay*, p. 118.

consider while challenging censorship. Theatre adaptor Harry Gibson referred to BBC Radio's difficulty with the language. Gibson, however, instead of deciding to reconsider the language in order to ensure a mainstream audience, resolved to remain faithful to Welsh's own style. In later theatrical adaptations such as *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, Gibson continued this tradition. Chris Mitchell has argued that 'Gibson's commitment to faithfully representing the text doesn't shy away from the novel's most appalling moments.'<sup>57</sup> Gibson himself explains the importance of remaining truthful to the text:

If you have to cry or turn away from particular scenes, then you do. But the scenes stay in. It's necessary that they are there ... it's not classic, it's not old, it's not trying to teach you something, it's not trying to tell you to live better lives, it's just there like the smell of your own sweat. I really wish theatre could keep on being like that and not keep slipping back into being a snobby, musty medium.<sup>58</sup>

The loss of language in an adaptation of Welsh's fiction would more than likely attract the same criticism levelled at Parker's adaptation of Doyle and his extraction of local signifiers and dialect for a mainstream release.

The issue of language, dialect and subtitling for the foreign release of films, discussed briefly in relation to adaptations of Roddy Doyle's fiction becomes particularly pertinent in the analysis of *Trainspotting*. Films from Scotland, most recently *My Name is Joe*, *Orphans*, *Ratcatcher*, and *The Acid House*, have been subtitled, the idea being that outside Scotland no one can understand local dialects and accents. In one particular review in *Screen International* concern was expressed for the release of *Trainspotting* because of Americans 'not understanding Leith-speak'.<sup>59</sup> As David Bruce notes, Scotland is more familiar with American accents and landscape than its own.<sup>60</sup> John Hodge admits that the adaptation of *Trainspotting* involved the toning down of Scots. Some reviewers pointed

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<sup>57</sup> Mitchell, 'Expletives Repeated'.

<sup>58</sup> Mitchell, 'Expletives Repeated'.

<sup>59</sup> 'Below the Line', *Screen International*, 18 October 1996, p. 48.

<sup>60</sup> Bruce, *Scotland: The Movie*, p. 2.

out that the voice-over, in a "light Scottish accent", serves as a mouthpiece for other characters whom the spectators may not understand.<sup>61</sup> Some even suggest that twenty minutes of the opening sequence (including Renton's 'Choose a Life' speech) was dubbed for release in the states.<sup>62</sup>

The film's trailer suffered from a similar form of censorship, but for reasons of taste rather than clarity. For John Hodge the problem encountered with Welsh's language lay not with the dialect, but the use of language that might be deemed as inappropriate. Drawing from footage from the opening sequence involving Renton's powerful 'Choose a life' speech, the trailer successfully communicates the fast-paced style of the film. But the language of the narrative's voice-over proved an obstacle for the format of the mainstream cinema device. After considering the complete omission of certain words from the sequence, the filmmakers decided on 'bleeping' over the offensive language, with the hope that it 'preserved some of the original character of the speech, but also made it funny...'<sup>63</sup> By concealing the language in this transparent manner, rather than omitting it entirely, the trailer manages to avoid offending those in the audience whom the film is probably not intended for in the first place, while partaking in a complicit joke with potential spectators.<sup>64</sup> Fortunately the technique was only reserved for the trailer and did not make its way into the film, but its use draws attention to the raised awareness of what will offend in film when compared to literature. Although I have never heard of anyone counting the

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<sup>61</sup> Stollery, *Trainspotting*, p. 22. Ironically, this criticism of the appearance of an authoritative voice in the film is exactly what Willy Maley praises Welsh's novel for avoiding in his article 'Subversion and Squirrility'. He explains that the fundamental difference between Kelman and Welsh is evident in 'the absence of a moral centre and of a controlling consciousness' in Welsh's fiction, and although Renton may be the central character, other characters are 'given a fair hearing in a way that is lacking in Kelman's fiction' (p. 195).

<sup>62</sup> 'Film of the week: *Trainspotting*', *Radio Times*, 3-9 July 1999, p. 47.

<sup>63</sup> Devrey quoted in Caroline Westbrook, 'Trainspotting: Cover Story', *Empire*, March 1996, pp. 90-102: 102.

<sup>64</sup> In fact, as Willy Maley has pointed out, Welsh utilizes profanity as a tool to keep certain segments of the population at a distance (Maley, 'Subversion and Squirrility', pp. 198). However, it ultimately attracts those Welsh wishes to repel, namely what Welsh terms 'middle-class brats' and 'lazy, wanky critics'. Welsh, quoted from Dominic Cavendish, *Irvine Welsh: I'm Sorry Everybody*, *The Big Issue in Scotland*, 1998, p. 158.

'shites' in *Trainspotting* (the film) in the same way that the 'fucks' were famously tallied in James Kelman's writing, even the minimal degree of swear words remaining in the film generated a high degree of criticism. The crucial difference lies in the fact that the counting of swear words in Kelman's fiction occurs after his uncensored publication and success, whereas it is the filmmaker's anticipation of this same sort of criticism and their reliance on mainstream success that leads to self-censorship.

A review by Andrew O'Hagan in *Sight and Sound* suggested that the language of *Trainspotting* ensured 'political ramifications'.<sup>65</sup> Maybe so, but perhaps less so in a film which, at the mercy of box-office success, is forced to soften the edges of its delivery. If *How Late It Was, How Late* was adapted to film, the 'fucks' would no doubt either be cut down, or eliminated under the auspices of the novel's wordiness of form, and the film's concise, verbal terseness. Either way, as Willy Maley has argued for the significance of their uncensored existence:

Those who can't swear or won't swear, in other words those who don't give a fuck, are a different matter. They might like to imagine a curse free Kelman, one that would lose the shell of bad language but retain the kernel of good storytelling. This is another blind alley. The swearing is integral to Kelman's power as a writer. It is neither a vulgar and superfluous supplement nor an offensive coating concealing shortcomings in narrative, dialogue, or characterisation. To focus on the swearing to the exclusion of all else is to lose one's eyesight, to be blind to the text.<sup>66</sup>

The aspiration to 'lose the shell' but 'retain the kernel' of Kelman's story recalls Seymour Chatman's analysis of the *kernels* and *satellites* of narrative apparent in the process of adaptation.<sup>67</sup> While it might be possible to communicate Kelman's basic narrative with sterilised language, it would be losing the point. As many texts resist adaptation because of complex relations between *story* and *discourse* which the discourse of film might fail to

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<sup>65</sup> Andrew O'Hagan, 'The Boys Are Back in Town', *Sight and Sound*, February 1996, pp. 6-11: 2.

<sup>66</sup> Willy Maley, 'Swearing Blind: Kelman and the Curse of the Working Classes', *Edinburgh Review*, no. 95, Spring 1996, pp. 105-112: 108.

<sup>67</sup> Seymour Chatman, 'What Novels Can Do'.



communicate, Maley warns against turning a blind eye to the importance of articulation in Kelman's texts. Kelman's 'creative cursing', is more than a marker of masculinity and class, since 'swearing and national identity are intimately bound up together'.<sup>68</sup> Or, as Douglas Gifford writes, 'Kelman wages war on cultural imperialism and "Eng Lit"'.<sup>69</sup> The language or style of writing becomes just as important, if not more so, than the narrative content itself, and the attack on aspects of contemporary society is worked out in the first instance through language.

Welsh's novel *Glue*, following the lives of four friends from Leith and occasionally crossing paths with characters from *Trainspotting*, also posits language as significant in one passage in particular.<sup>70</sup> Three of the central characters, Carl Ewart, Andrew Galloway and Billy Birrell, arriving late for school, are met by a teacher who reprimands them, then asks Billy if his name is Birrell. Billy replies 'Aye' much to the dismay of the teacher:

Aye? Aye he sortay shrieks, pointing tae his specs. It sounded like some cunt hud grabbed ehs baws. – Eyes are what you have in your head you stupid boy! We speak the Queen's English here. (p. 82)

This passage depicting the teacher's refusal to listen to any language other than standard English is illustrative of Welsh's aims in much of his fiction to expose the prejudices against spoken and written Scots. As Cairns Craig has argued: 'From the perspective of English speakers and of English culture, Scots is a language of leftovers, the detritus of proper speech and good writing, a supplement poisonous to the health of the real language of its society.'<sup>71</sup> What Craig's analysis emphasises is the centrality of the role of English culture. What Welsh struggles to unearth is evident in this sequence's ironic revelation that although the teacher ultimately through authoritative control may bully Billy into

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<sup>68</sup> Maley, 'Swearing Blind', p. 107.

<sup>69</sup> Gifford, 'Imagining Scotlands', p. 30.

<sup>70</sup> Irvine Welsh, *Glue* (London: Vintage, 2002). All subsequent references will be to this edition.

<sup>71</sup> Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel*, p. 76.

submission, forcing him to speak English, his reach falls short of the novel's narration, which will quickly continue in the character's own Scots voice. Duncan McLean has written of a similar incident (only real rather than imagined) in which someone was found in contempt of court for insisting on the use of the word 'aye' instead of 'yes'.

The judge understood, however, that folk speaking in their own voice is the first step down a road that leads to them thinking their own thoughts and taking control of their own lives. The state doesn't want people being in control of their own lives, so when opportunities arise it will force people into adopting a voice of which it approves, or into silence.<sup>72</sup>

The fictional and real struggle over the word 'aye' both disclose the powerful implications language carries. Welsh's clever exposure of the 'policing' of language quietly integrated into contemporary culture has even been illustrated by the mere circulation of one of his texts: *Porno*. In a review for *The Herald* (Glasgow), Willy Maley draws humor from his inability to put the novel as a subject heading in the email to the newspaper's editor without it being filtered out as an inappropriate email. He writes that this 'policing of language is what Irvine Welsh and others have been fighting and writing against'.<sup>73</sup>

Although the use of language in its written form has been the source of some criticism, its integral role in the overall narrative cannot be denied.<sup>74</sup> As with Kelman's fiction and Welsh's other work, in addition to 'authentic' representation the use of language serves to expose inequalities and inconsistencies in the general employment of language and the culture at large. Alan Freeman writes:

*Trainspotting* embodies in its form not just the local system of working-class Edinburgh dialect, without compromise to a supposed standard position in language; it also enacts the tension within this system, between different social registers, divergent discourses within which to interpret reality.

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<sup>72</sup> Duncan McLean, 'An ABC of Bad Language', *Edinburgh Review*, no. 95, 1996, pp. 103-104: 103.

<sup>73</sup> Willy Maley, 'Welsh's Literary Passport Stamped', *The Herald (Weekend Living)*, 17 August 2002, p. 12.

<sup>74</sup> Elspeth Findlay, for instance, wrongly accuses Welsh's use of dialect (occasionally employing a standard English omniscient narration) for revealing a middle class perspective aiming to satisfy 'a reader who enjoys a bit of literary rough, a night of slumming it in the pages of a paperback, before returning to the responsibilities of middle class life in the morning.' Elspeth Findlay, 'The Bourgeois Values of Irvine Welsh', *Cencrastus*, 71, 2002, pp. 5-7.

Later, in the same essay, he explains that in addition to

simply being part of normal speech, swearing like nick-names serves to emphasise form over content, and the relational nature of subject-status, undermining the concept of selfhood as a fixed element in social exchange.<sup>75</sup>

What is hopeful in the way the filmmakers approach the difficulties with the 'taming' of the *Trainspotting* sequence for the trailer, is that what was considered 'bad' language was not cut altogether, but that more importantly it acknowledges the importance of 'form over content', which Alan Freeman stresses as crucial in the meaning of Welsh's writing. The importance of language and articulation is cleverly retained in an abstract way that only allows the spectators to be offended as far as *their own* imaginations would allow.

In an essay on James Kelman, A.L. Kennedy and Irvine Welsh entitled 'Realism Fucking Realism', Freeman has explained how in *Trainspotting* 'Words are emptied of full semantic content'.<sup>76</sup> In effect, this is what the 'bleeping' of the trailer might ironically serve to emphasise. In other words, Welsh's own emphasis on the self-conscious, constructed nature of language is retained in the trailer's use of an almost self-referential device, which draws attention to their own hand in 'communicating' Welsh's text rather than attempting to conceal their influence as another layer of articulation. Even in this limited fashion, Welsh's subversive style, which Duncan McLean has detailed as a 'commitment to the voice as the basis of literary art, rather than some supposed canonical "officially approved" language',<sup>77</sup> is ironically communicated through the film's obvious inability to communicate it through its own mainstream form.

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<sup>75</sup> Alan Freeman, 'Ghosts in Sunny Leith: Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*', in Susanne Hagemann (ed.), *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), pp. 251-262: 254-255.

<sup>76</sup> Alan Freeman, 'Realism Fucking Realism: The Word on the Street -- Kelman, Kennedy and Welsh', *Cencrastus*, Summer 1997, pp. 6-7: 7.

<sup>77</sup> As quoted in Willy Maley, 'You'll Have Had Your Theatre', *Spike Online*, [www.spikemagazine.com/0199welshplay.htm](http://www.spikemagazine.com/0199welshplay.htm).

What the *Trainspotting* trailer illustrates is that it is not only 'literary' associations which threaten the representation of contemporary narratives. Film may be even more vulnerable to outside censorship because of its status as a public medium, often funded publicly and sometimes distributed on public television. And perhaps may be subjected to even more control when dependent on mainstream success. Although Irvine Welsh has pointed to the fact that 'standard' English, a 'boring' and 'bland' language used in the novel, does not in any way exist in film, because the spectator 'would never put up with it in the cinema or TV or records', it could also be argued the reverse is true, that other innovative forms of writing have made appearances in written form, but would never be represented fully on screen.<sup>78</sup> As the comments of Harry Gibson suggest, film is not entirely without its restrictions or inadvertent forms of censorship.

In both the novel and film, the monologue rallies against a capitalist society, unhealthily obsessed with consumer culture inherent in the general over-consumption often identified as America's true greatest export. In the film, additional repercussions are amassed through its unavoidable associations with the values of mainstream cinema and Hollywood. Keith Hopper has explained how 'in Hollywood homogeneity is synonymous with power, and bland is beautiful'.<sup>79</sup> Or as Michael Higgins puts it Hollywood pursues: 'the colonisation of the imagination'.<sup>80</sup> In this regard, even if *Trainspotting* fails in fully representing Welsh's language, as an independent film it reacts against the homogenising influences of Hollywood with its specificity of voice. Irvine Welsh explains his view on the matter as 'Soon we'll all be globalised and everywhere, Scotland included, will be like the blandest parts of Pennsylvania or Belgium or Surrey. Right now, enjoy the dark pubs, the brown sauce on the chips, (which are stacked on both shoulders), the black, raucous

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<sup>78</sup> 'Web Chat with Irvine Welsh', [www3.sympatico.co/simsg/wpchat.htm](http://www3.sympatico.co/simsg/wpchat.htm).

<sup>79</sup> Keith Hopper, *'Trainspotting'*, p 1.

<sup>80</sup> As quoted in Jackson, 'Dislocating the Nation', p. 131.

humour and the eccentric use of the English language.<sup>81</sup> So while the film might in some ways be defeated by the financial pull of transglobal cinema, it's still a long way from surrendering form for content.

Yet, the influence of Hollywood on the film is clear. Danny Boyle has expressed his appreciation for the use of voice-over in a film such as *GoodFellas* (Martin Scorsese, 1990). Accordingly, Karen Lury has compared the use of voice-over in *Trainspotting* to its employment in *GoodFellas*; in addition to *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944) and *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950).<sup>82</sup> Although Boyle explains initially considering the voice-over a 'substitute for the visual' he later determined that in reality 'you need to visualize a lot more because you need to create a lot of material to allow the voice-over to have its time.'<sup>83</sup> Correspondingly, Lury has suggested, the voice-over may, in effect, uproot the narrative from any sense of time or space altogether. In a similar way that the rest of the soundtrack, consisting of songs from many different eras, resists concise associations with any particular time period, the voice-over temporally dissociates itself as 'both present and absent'.<sup>84</sup> This is a characteristic Susanne Hagemann points out is echoed in the novel, which depicts Welsh's characters existing in an 'eternal present'.<sup>85</sup>

Boyle's, Lury's and Hagemann's comments all assume that the narrative voice functions to distance its characters from the realities within the frame of the narrative. Gill Jamieson, on the other hand, explains narrative voice as closely tied to place and argues that the narrative's 'authenticity is registered in the first instance through verbal as well as

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<sup>81</sup> Irvine Welsh, 'Pride and Prejudice', *The Herald Magazine*, 10 August 2002, pp. 9-10: 10.

<sup>82</sup> Lury, 'Here and Then', p. 108.

<sup>83</sup> From Finney, *The State of European Cinema*, p. 179.

<sup>84</sup> Lury, 'Here and Then', p. 105.

<sup>85</sup> Hagemann, *Studies in Scottish Fiction*, p. 13.

topographical rendering of place markers'.<sup>86</sup> But rather than putting language in its place, perhaps what these seemingly contradictory analyses reveal is that Welsh's ostensibly realist narrations work to destabilize their very form. Rather than traditional literary 'realism', Welsh's form often criticises and undermines notions of 'realism' while depicting 'the real'.<sup>87</sup> *Trainspotting*, the film, further demonstrates this resistance to realism through its occasional literal visualisation of the very real 'alter-reality' of the life of a drug addict. Even though the realist constraints of the camera might resist the irony Welsh creates through his subversion of a realist style in the text, the voice-over in the film works in juxtaposition to the camera's representation, and instead of forging a continuity with the more surreal visual scenes, suggests the instability of narrative realism. Additionally, the filmmakers identify an equivalent method of subverting the image on its own. Sarah Street has commented on Danny Boyle's film's tendency to offer an image which it later subverts, similar to the style of Soviet Montage.<sup>88</sup> This style, best described as magic realism, is representative of the subversive tone of Welsh's novel, but is wholly unique to the film.

### *Magic realism*

In Eddie Dick's *From Limelight to Satellite*, Adrienne Scullion drew attention to the fine line between mythology and magic realism, 'underground notoriety' vs. 'privileged status', and put forward an alternative interpretation of the function of mythology, suggesting that instead of being viewed as a 'psychosis', mythology might be viewed in other cases as 'magic realism'.<sup>89</sup> This proposal Duncan Petrie takes up some years later in his *Screening Scotland* as a way out of the tendency to 'oversimplify' the kailyard, an affinity for which

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<sup>86</sup> Gill Jamieson, 'Fixing the City: Arterial and Other Spaces in Irvine Welsh's Fiction', in Glenda Norquay and Gerry Smyth (eds.), *Space and Place* (Liverpool: John Moores University Press, 1997), pp. 217-226: 217.

<sup>87</sup> In 'Realism Fucking Realism', Freeman makes this point in his analysis of James Kelman's use of language, pp. 6-7.

<sup>88</sup> Street, 'Trainspotting', p. 184.

<sup>89</sup> Adrienne Scullion, 'Screening the Heyday: Scottish Cinema in the 1930s' in Dick (ed.), *From Limelight to Satellite*, pp. 41-52. Referenced by Petrie in his *Screening Scotland*, p. 8.

he criticises *Scotch Reels*. This tendency Petrie interprets as resulting in the oversight of films which did not fit easily into the framework of kailyard. What Petrie identifies in Scullion's keen observations is the possibility of relating the idea to contemporary Scottish cinema.

On one level, myth involves itself in the formation of the 'imagined community' which Benedict Anderson identifies as a foundation of national identity. As Richard Kearney writes, it is 'concerned with wish-fulfillment and reversal, with making possible at an imaginary level what is impossible in our real or empirical experience' and has the capacity to provide 'symbolic solutions to problems of sovereignty which remain irresolvable at a socio-political level'.<sup>90</sup> Homi Bhabha opens *Nation and Narration* with a similar definition of this imaginary space: 'Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye.'<sup>91</sup> However as Kearney cautions the nation is, also 'a two-way street. It can lead to perversion (bigotry, racism, fascism) or to liberation (the reactivation of a genuine social imaginary open to universal horizons). If we need to mythologize, we also need to demythologise. And this double process requires discrimination between authentic and inauthentic uses of myth.'<sup>92</sup> The connection proves even more revealing when the elements of magic realism apparent in new Scottish cinema are compared with their predecessors. Films such as *Orphans* or *Trainspotting* seem more closely linked to previous films such as Bill Douglas' *Trilogy*, or *Venus Peter*.<sup>93</sup> On the other hand, perhaps the intimate relations between mythological representation and magical realism are evidence of an attempt to destabilize certain mythologies.

*Trainspotting*, like Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) (the film the filmmakers recognize as a primary source of inspiration), or even *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned*

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<sup>90</sup> Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland*, p. 109.

<sup>91</sup> Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 1.

<sup>92</sup> Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland*, p. 121.

to *Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1963) rely on surrealist representations of hardened myths in order to generate their satirical readings.

Murray Smith, referring to the style of *Trainspotting* as 'Black Magic Realism'<sup>94</sup>, explains that had the film adhered entirely to the style of the novel, it would have found itself in line with a more social realist tradition of the cinema of Grierson, Loach, Leigh and Douglas, but instead what Smith sees as an 'achievement' of the adaptation 'involves a transformation of this realism, accomplished by intensifying the novel's black humour, buoying it up with an effervescent style, fuel-injecting it with the rhythms of pop, and leavening it with fantasy in the manner of magic realism'.<sup>95</sup> Although Smith admits magic realism was not entirely absent from the novel, he argues, the levels of magic realism and social realism are reversed in the film version. Boyle has even expressed his own feelings on wanting to retain what he refers to as the 'surrealistic' tone of the book.<sup>96</sup> While Smith's distinction focuses on the disparate relations of social realist representations and surrealist, in actuality, the distance between the two is relatively small. If we recall André Breton's formulations on surrealism noted in the introductory chapter, rather than a distant relation, surrealism similarly values the real and holds the 'desire to deepen the foundations of the real'. If the surrealism is intensified in the film version, it may not be as far a jump as Smith implies.

Smith argues this position by pointing to the fact that in *The Acid House*, scripted by Welsh, much of the realism of the original is retained. But rather than a literary definition of 'magic realism', Smith distinguishes the film stylistically as 'black magic realism', evoking its tendency to evince dark humour through the grotesque. Smith identifies this

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<sup>93</sup> Not surprisingly, a member of *Trainspotting*'s successful triumvirate, Andrew MacDonald, worked on *Venus Peter* and on *The Big Man*.

<sup>94</sup> Likewise Roderick Watson, in 'Maps of Desire', refers to Welsh's writing style as 'demotic realism' (p. 303).

<sup>95</sup> Smith, *Trainspotting*, p. 75.

<sup>96</sup> Finney, *The State of European Cinema*, p. 177.



characteristic as arising from a tradition of dark humour evident in various cultural formats; he mentions Joe Orton, *Monty Python*, *The Young Ones*, *Viz*, *Spitting Image*, *Brass Eye*, and *Jam* as British cultural texts employing 'grotesque humour'. On the other hand, the film's literary origins may point to recent studies of Scottish Fiction which have identified the gothic qualities of contemporary writers.<sup>97</sup> Again, as it has been previously discussed, the surrealist tendencies of these writers are not far from the concerns of a social realist writer such as James Kelman.

Although Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* has been described as 'bog gothic'<sup>98</sup>, *Trainspotting* fulfils this literally in the surrealism of its 'Worst Toilet in Scotland' sequence. Welsh's novel follows Renton into the blocked toilet at a local shop where he empties his guts, and then dredges through the overflowing toilet for lost suppositories (p. 24-25). Similar to McCabe's account of Francie defecating on the Nugent's floor, the roots of this horrific portrait can be found in Gothic fiction. John Scagg's has noted the episode in *The Butcher Boy* to be linked with the Gothic through its 'fascination with transgression, and its anxiety with social and cultural limits and boundaries', which is represented as first 'a very *physical* transgression' and later a '*social* transgression'.<sup>99</sup> The sheer horror of this unflinching account of the life of an addict, John Hodge found difficult to portray without elements of fantasy. As he explained: 'when I came to write the scene in the toilet, the idea of seeing that in a totally realistic way was totally off-putting to me'.<sup>100</sup> Instead, the filmmakers heighten the realism in Welsh's writing to its extreme, pushing the grotesque into the outer limits of beauty. The scene begins with the film's own typescript over the door, proclaiming it 'The Worst Toilet in Scotland', and involves Renton literally diving into the toilet. At this point, a tranquil classical score joins the soundtrack as Renton, like a

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<sup>97</sup> Alan Bissett (ed.), *Damage Land: New Scottish Gothic Fiction* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2001).

<sup>98</sup> Ann Hornaday, 'Horrific, witty "Butcher Boy"', [http://www.sunspot.net/our\\_town/film/data/thebutcherboy.html](http://www.sunspot.net/our_town/film/data/thebutcherboy.html).

<sup>99</sup> Scaggs, 'Who is Francie Pig?', p. 52.

pearl fisher, seeks out his suppositories. When he emerges head-first from the toilet, gasping for air, the spell is broken as he re-enters the realities of the worst toilet in Scotland. Again, like Patricia Horton's argument, Smith's insight highlights another schism in which fantasy threatens to overtake reality, in a way that illustrates the abject satirical properties of the narrative. But this is inherent in Welsh's writing, albeit in a slightly varied form.

Welsh's subversion of reality is perhaps most evident in the 'Junk Dilemma' episodes because of the narrators' altered consciousness. These short dream-like passages are offset from the rest of text with italics. For example, 'Junk Dilemmas No. 66', in italics and under ten lines, depicts Renton's overdose and his inability to move (p. 177). In the film the episode is framed in velvet upholstery as Renton literally sinks into the carpet. This framing device signals a layering within the narration – the filmmakers, but also Renton's own – and is reminiscent of techniques employed by other contemporary writers. Alasdair Gray, for instance, employs a sort of framing device within the presentation of the text itself by positioning passages in relation to others on the page instead of adhering to the conventional layout. Welsh adopts this technique in his novel *Filth* (soon to be made into a film). The narration of a police officer is interspersed with the commentary of the worm that infests his body, threatening to drown out his own voice. The novel ends with the officer finally ridding himself of the parasite as the final words of the worm appear as text in the shape of the tail-end of the worm.<sup>101</sup>

These connections signal a link between Scottish writing and filmmaking practices in addition to the bridge between social realist narratives and surrealist ones. What all of these representations appear to value is a commitment to a realistic portrait of the Scotland the text is relating too. Even if the authenticity of the representation of the 'real' – real or

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<sup>100</sup> Finney, *The State of European Cinema*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>101</sup> Irvine Welsh, *Filth* (London: Vintage, 1999).

imagined – in *Trainspotting* might lead Andrew Higson to interpret it as an 'ambivalent image' of Britain, it no doubt serves as a decisive representation of Leith, a place that had thus far remained largely unseen on screen and is characteristic of a particular postmodern urban context.

#### 4. Alan Warner: *Morvern Callar*

In 1996, the publication of Alan Warner's novel, *Morvern Callar*, which tells the dark story of a young woman dealing with the death of her partner in her own highly individual manner, aroused considerable interest with its inventive new representation of Scotland beyond the scope of what previous representations had entailed.<sup>1</sup> James Kelman had won the Booker two years earlier with *How Late It Was How Late*, Irvine Welsh was enjoying the success of *Trainspotting* as its film version hit the screen and book sales went up, and Kevin Williamson, editor of *Rebel Inc.*, had just launched *The Children of Albion Rovers*, a collection backed by Edinburgh publishing house, Canongate, and featuring writers previously published in his literary fanzine (including Alan Warner).<sup>2</sup> Scotland's literary scene seemed awash with success stories, yet Alan Warner's novel proved powerful enough to garner significant attention on the strength of its own distinct voice.

Six years later, Lynne Ramsay's contribution as director and co-adaptor of Warner's *Morvern Callar* represents the only female intervention among the adaptations covered within the scope of this thesis - writer or director. At the film's premiere at the Edinburgh Film Festival, the appearance of Ramsay alongside the two female lead characters - Samantha Morton and Kathleen McDermott, as well as executive producer, Barbara McKissack, signalled a departure from the usually male-dominated environment of filmmaking in Scotland.<sup>3</sup> On stage before the screening, the film's producer was quick to point out the largely female involvement in the project. Tellingly, in the round of thanks to all those who made it possible, Alan Warner, the story's original teller, was close to

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Warner, *Morvern Callar* (London: Vintage, 1996). All further references will be to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Williamson (ed.) *Children of Albion Rovers* (Edinburgh: Rebel Inc., 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Warner himself was absent from the gathering because he was across town at an engagement for the Edinburgh Book Festival.

being forgotten. Morton rushed in at the last minute to remind the director to thank the author, without whom there would be no Morvern.

Ramsay's bid for authorship seems ironically foretold in the experiences of the narrative's central character, Morvern, who, finding her boyfriend dead on the floor with his new novel on disk accompanied by the message 'I wrote it for you', deletes his name and assumes authorship herself. Roland Barthes' predictions are realised, and the author is declared dead, but the text lives on, on page and screen.<sup>4</sup> Ramsay resurrects the text with her own interpretation. Certainly, the new 'female' perspective that Ramsay and her posse may offer is welcome considering the criticism Warner's ventriloquist style received for his allegedly voyeuristic tone hovering over Morvern's narrative voice. Warner was also criticised in a similar fashion for his vicarious style in *The Sopranos*.<sup>5</sup> Even so, the fact that the film was the project of a crew largely consisting of women does not ensure that the narrative is liberated from the confines of a male gaze.

### ***Warner Bros.***

The novel's author, Alan Warner, originally attempted to script an adapted version himself, but encountered difficulty. The novel, in his own words, 'is very dense, just like its author'.<sup>6</sup> In the end, the task of paring down the intricate plot for screen was taken on by the film's director and the experienced scriptwriter Liani Dognini, who has collaborated with Ramsay on several films. For *Morvern Callar*, Warner wanted to adhere to the filmmaker's 'vision' because, as he explained, 'she's a real artist and I just want to go with her vision of the film not mine.'<sup>7</sup> Warner, undoubtedly pleased with the authorial handover, expressed his confidence in the director, citing Ramsay and Michael Caton-

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<sup>4</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in Seán Burke (ed.), *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), pp. 125-130.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Warner, *The Sopranos* (London: Vintage, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Keith Bruce, 'Prize-winning director picks Oban ahead of Hollywood', *The Herald*, 2 March 2001, Front Page (Diary 22).

Jones of *Rob Roy* fame as the best Scottish filmmakers to emerge since Bill Douglas.

Warner's second novel, *The Sopranos*, following an all-girl school choir, is currently being filmed by Caton-Jones in an adaptation scripted by Warner himself.

Warner, a novelist, poet, and short story writer, originally from Oban but now settled in Ireland, could be likened to Bernard MacLaverty (an Irish writer of fiction some critics argue '*should be Scottish*'<sup>8</sup>) as a Scottish author who is increasingly claimed as Irish. Warner explains his present lifestyle as 'distanced from changes going on in Scotland'<sup>9</sup> and has remarked upon the need to return to Oban if he is to finish his next novel set there. In his most recent work, *The Man Who Walks*, the influence of his exile is evidenced by the increasing frequency with which Irish characters surface in the novel's Scottish landscape and even the occasional jump in narrative place to Ireland itself, such as the novel's reflection on the central character's visit to Dublin.<sup>10</sup>

Warner was first discovered by Duncan McLean, then editor of *Rebel Inc.* and *Clocktower Press*, publications which served as a stepping stone for several successful writers, including Irvine Welsh. Before then, Warner's first novel, which would win him the Somerset Maugham award, was hidden away in a shoe-box, believed by himself to be unlike anything else published until he read McLean and Jeff Torrington.<sup>11</sup> Since McLean's discovery, in addition to the publication of his novels, Warner's work appeared in various anthologies, including Sarah Champion's *Disco Biscuits*, Kevin Williamson's *Children of Albion Rovers*, and also McLean's anthology revisiting the publications of

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<sup>7</sup> Zoë Strachan, 'Existential Ecstasy', n. pag.

<sup>8</sup> Spring, 'Image and Text: Fiction on Film', p. 214.

<sup>9</sup> Redhead, *Repetitive Beat Generation*, p.133.

<sup>10</sup> Alan Warner, *The Man Who Walks* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Melissa Denes, 'Girls' Secrets, Men's Myths', *The Guardian*, 25 May 2002, p. 38.

Clocktower Press, *Ahead of Its Time*.<sup>12</sup> Published in these anthologies alongside writers such as Irvine Welsh, Warner was quickly identified as part of the Chemical Generation literary movement, a classification with which he has expressed unease.<sup>13</sup> The comparison persisted with the release of the first adaptation of his work, hailed as the female *Trainspotting*.<sup>14</sup>

### **Lynne Ramsay**

Ramsay, who emerged from National Film School, winning various awards for her short films *Small Deaths* (1996, Jury prize at Cannes), *Kill the Day* (1997, Clermont Ferrand Jury Prize), and *The Gasman* (1997, Jury prize at Cannes), has resisted the comparison of *Morvern Callar* with *Trainspotting*.<sup>15</sup> More accurately, Ramsay's seemingly personal vision has been compared to Bill Douglas, director of an autobiographical trilogy,<sup>16</sup> described by Duncan Petrie as most like silent cinema or montage which focuses its power on the image.<sup>17</sup> Like Douglas, Ramsay's films thus far have documented her own coming of age - first with *Ratcatcher*, which Ramsay both directed and scripted, and now with *Morvern Callar*, charting youthful transition into adulthood. Like Douglas' *My Childhood* (1972), which evokes an emotional poignancy in its steady focus on the small gestures, Ramsay's films slow down the ticking over of narrative time, in order to focus on the most delicate of details. For example in Douglas' film, the camera follows the movements of the boy emptying a seemingly frivolous cup filled with dying flowers so that he may fill it with

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<sup>12</sup> Sarah Champion (ed.) *Disco Biscuits* (London: Sceptre, 1997); Duncan McLean (ed.), *Ahead of its Time* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> In 'Existential Ecstasy', an interview with Zoë Strachan, Warner explained: 'I think you can write a good story about a nightclub but I don't think you can base a whole literary movement on writing about nightclub life and ecstasy use. What bothered me about it is it was getting to be more about writers than the writing', n. pag.

<sup>14</sup> Linda Ruth Williams, 'Escape Artist', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 12, no. 10, 2002, pp. 23-25: 25.

<sup>15</sup> Williams, 'Escape Artist', p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> *My Childhood* (1972), *My Ain Folk* (1973), *My Way Home* (1978). For a further analysis see Eddie Dick, Andrew Noble, and Duncan Petrie (eds.), *Bill Douglas: A Lanternist's Account* (London: BFI, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> Petrie, *Screening Scotland*, p. 159.

boiling water long enough to adequately heat it up so that his grandmother could warm her hands. In *Ratcatcher*, this focus on the small gesture is apparent when the young boy is compelled to shift the hole in the stocking from around his mother's toe. In *Morvern Callar*, this focus on minute detail continues, alongside the measured close-ups of silent characters, allowed to speak for themselves in a similar manner to the silent figures who inhabit the world of Bill Douglas' films.

Like Douglas, often described as a European filmmaker rather than Scottish, Ramsay aligns herself with European art cinema instead of any Scottish tradition. According to Duncan Petrie, 'the most tangible link between Scotland and the traditions of art cinema is provided by the small but significant range of films reflecting a powerful and poetic sense of personal experience and biographical narrative'.<sup>18</sup> Ramsay, explaining the personal nature of her interest in the story of *Morvern Callar* says:

I hadn't read anything like it before. She was like a character I'd write, and I'd been talking about writing a character like her, an unusual character you can judge in different ways. She never analyses herself, she lives very much day to day, and what she does is very unusual and shocks people. I suppose this character just blew me away.<sup>19</sup>

Alan Warner's dark portrait of escape from social and economic oppression shares numerous similarities with Ramsay's *Ratcatcher*. Ramsay's first film captures the central character, James, within the oppressive landscape of his rat-infested tenement building and the freedom-filled opportunity of his newfound open field, in a fashion which would mirror Morvern's relationship to the cold restrictive landscape of Oban and her musings in the open landscapes of Spain and experiences at the rave.

Both narratives of escape from contemporary Scotland rely on elements of fantasy. An act which hints at their investment in a similar type of narration Bhabha describes as outside

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<sup>18</sup> Petrie, *Screening Scotland*, p. 168.

<sup>19</sup> Cooper, 'Perfect Vision', p. 24.



time and only completely formed 'in the mind's eye'.<sup>20</sup> One of *Ratcatcher's* more surreal episodes depicts a rat cruelly tied to a balloon by James as he is goaded by a group of bullies. After the traumatic event, we witness what might have been in the mind's eye of the boy, imagining his once pet gallantly orbiting the moon. Ramsay also endows her second film with tinges of the surreal, often glamorising the macabre, but always further investing the narrative with Morvern's point-of-view – an element of clear importance in the novel. For example, Morvern's complex account of burying 'Him' (her partner) is poetically gruesome, the entire passage weaving between an idealised landscape and a nightmarish one. Sometimes this jump across genres occurs within a single sentence: 'The sun was hot on my hair as His chopped-off head bumped away against my back' (p. 88). Further on in the passage, after having finished the burial, Morvern surveys her accomplishment: 'Two arms and a leg were buried on the cliff above the sycamore tree and higher up the torso and leg would be helping flower the sheets of bluebells below the dripping rocks. All across the land bits of Him were buried' (p. 91). And later Morvern's poetic language describes her standing in 'In the creamy shade of the birch trees a breeze flipped up the leaves showing their silvery undersides, and the sun trilling through flicked shadows on my face'(p. 91). The entire passage delivers the macabre in a tone of surrealistic beauty with – as in much of the film – the soundtrack playing a crucial role.

Whereas the book stresses the importance of music, through frequent appearances of play lists (from 'His' collection, of course), the film delivers much of its musical tracks through Morvern's personal stereo. From the opening sequence, when the first song Morvern listens to after lying over the body of her dead boyfriend is Can's 'I Want More', music sets the tone. The soundtrack is used in contrast to the weight of certain scenes. In particular, in the scene where Morvern hacks up the body, and also the one where she buries the body, music pushes the viewer away from the heavy contexts, in the same repressed manner to that through which Morvern herself relies on music to cope with various circumstances,

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<sup>20</sup> Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, p. 1.

resulting in a cruel mingling of beauty and brutality. Ramsay demonstrates this beautifully in the burial sequence, rendering the act in long shot against the highland landscape set to an ambient soundtrack not typically coupled with a violent scene. On the contrary, the brutal hacking and burial of 'Him' is the act which allows Morvern to escape her oppressive surroundings. Ramsay's added gesture is telling. When Morvern, after finishing the dirty work, places her hands in a stream, wriggling them up next to a cluster of worms. This is one of a series of instances throughout the film where Ramsay prefaces the realist image with surreal close-ups of insects, presented and observed by Morvern, as curious and unusual, yet beautiful. But perhaps Ramsay's and Warner's affinity with looking closely at the 'mundane', 'the everyday', or what is 'normal', until it reaches a point at which it flinches and exposes its abnormality, is part and parcel of a style shared by both Scottish cinema and literature.

Morvern's interest in rave culture is often detailed in an equally surreal manner and is crucial to Ramsay's portrayal of the sense of escape. Ramsay explains: 'it's about her, about why Morvern's so special. I think she escapes through music'.<sup>21</sup> But rather than being an uninhibited all-out celebration of Rave culture, ultimately Ramsay depicts the lifestyle as 'hedonism for its own sake', without purpose, but defining 'a lost generation' and the 'identity crisis within that generation'.<sup>22</sup> Alan Warner found that what was often overlooked that he 'was actually attacking aspects of culture'. Particularly in the music lists, he describes as 'rather obsessive, prosaic catalogues' more there for 'dramatic function' but poignantly marked by the fact that 'Morvern is listening, not to *her* music but to the favourite music of her dead boyfriend, therefore that prescriptive, rather hysterical listing had an emotional point'.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cooper, 'Perfect Vision', p. 24.

<sup>22</sup> Neil Cooper, 'The Vexed Generation', *The List*, 8-15 August 2002, pp. 38-40: 38.

<sup>23</sup> Redhead, *Repetitive Beat Generation*, pp. 131-132.

It is no surprise Ramsay was drawn to Warner's text, not only through the character, but the narrative structure. Seemingly beginning at the end, the novel opens with Morvern hovering over her dead boyfriend's body on the floor of his flat. This can be compared with *Ratcatcher's* unconventional beginning, which involves the death of a central character. Ramsay's newest project is an adaptation of the novel *Lovely Bones* (2002) by Alice Sebold, a novel which opens with the rape and murder of a 14 year-old girl and unfolds as a narration by the girl from beyond the grave, in true *Sunset Boulevard* style.

### ***Idolatry and indignation around the adaptation of Alan Warner's text***

*Morvern Callar*, the movie, met with mixed reviews. While some argued the film 'confirms Ramsay's reputation as a leading light among the new wave of British filmmakers, likely to go down as one of the best British films of the year',<sup>24</sup> others while recognizing Ramsay's first film, *Ratcatcher*, as representative of some of the best of British filmmaking, viewed *Morvern* as 'quite possibly representing some of its very worst', offering little more than 'a self-indulgent dreamscape paying little attention to narrative or character motivation and offering little respite from the film's unremitting dirge'.<sup>25</sup> Others maintained that it was the 'plot implausibilities' that caused distress.<sup>26</sup> The film's debut at the Telluride film festival prompted further disappointment. The film was described on the festival's website as depicting 'more of an abstract concept than a recognisable human being'.<sup>27</sup> This rather unfavourable review of the film unwittingly taps into some of the key, and indeed most innovative issues in the film's approach towards narrative cinema.

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<sup>24</sup> Xan Brooks, 'Morvern Callar', *The Guardian*, 24 July 2002, [film.guardian.co.uk/Print/0,3858,4467885,00.html](http://film.guardian.co.uk/Print/0,3858,4467885,00.html).

<sup>25</sup> Monika Maurer, 'Morvern Callar', *kamera.co.uk*, [www.kamera.co.uk/reviews\\_extra/morvern\\_callar.php](http://www.kamera.co.uk/reviews_extra/morvern_callar.php).

<sup>26</sup> Peter Bradshaw, 'Morvern Callar', *The Guardian*, 15 August 2002, [www.guardian.co.uk/arts/edinburgh2002/story/0,12262,774687,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/edinburgh2002/story/0,12262,774687,00.html).

<sup>27</sup> The 29<sup>th</sup> Telluride Film Festival, August 31 – September 3, 2002. From [www.turnerclassicmovies.com/News/Index/0,3371,00.html](http://www.turnerclassicmovies.com/News/Index/0,3371,00.html).

Morvern *is* rather abstract, and is at times barely recognizable in terms of conventional narrative protagonists. But this was precisely the aspect of Morvern's representation evident well before it was rendered on screen. As Alan Warner has explained, even in the novel:

She subverts what the novel is supposed to be about, the interior life of a character. Everything is a screen - the reason she tells you every texture in the food she's eating, every colour, is because she doesn't want to tell you what she is really feeling. There's a sense of, you're not worthy, I am above you.<sup>28</sup>

Morvern presents herself abstractly to the reader, revealing herself in the gaps and discrepancies of the narration. In Warner's follow-up novel, in which Morvern visits the island that was home to her foster-mother, *These Demented Lands*, the narration presents itself as even more abstract.<sup>29</sup> Douglas Gifford has argued that in *These Demented Lands*, 'the social realism of the first novel, if unconventional, becomes social surrealism'.<sup>30</sup> Most resembling the surreal tone of Granny Phimster/Couris Jean's recounting of the island in Warner's first book, the novel adopts Morvern's point-of-view even further to the extent that Morvern is involved in the punctuation of the written text. For example, in one passage Morvern ponders the apostrophe, almost as if highlighting her own awareness and sense of power over the constructed nature of the narrative: 'slowly down your back under the air bubble of your jackets (jacket's ...jackets': do you need these comma things??)' (p. 5). Morvern even ends the novel by apologizing in a letter to her father: 'Forgive my elliptical style: I want you to die in the maximum possible confusion' (p. 215). As readers, we are likewise subject to the complex manipulations of Morvern's narration. But is it possible for the director to get Morvern's tendency to 'subvert[s ]what the novel is

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<sup>28</sup> Denes, 'Girls' Secrets', p. 38.

<sup>29</sup> Alan Warner, *These Demented Lands* (London: Vintage, 1998). All subsequent references will be to this edition.

<sup>30</sup> Douglas Gifford, 'Ambiguities and Ironies (Review of *These Demented Lands*)', *Books in Scotland*, no. 62, Summer 1997, pp. 3-4: 3.

supposed to be about' across on screen? Or does the technique come to serve a different function?

Morvern's dedicated illustration of everyday detail in the places and objects surrounding her, like the meticulous recounting of the personally styled musical set lists, may on one hand be a narrative distraction, or a way of diverting the narrative focus from herself. On the other hand, it has an intrinsic value central to the narrative progression. The focus on the everyday works in contrast with the macabre. This is a technique familiar to Ramsay whose films demonstrate a focus on the visual detail of everyday objects as a necessary counterpoint to a social realist narrative, rendering the subject in an almost fantastical light.

Lynne Ramsay in this regard seems a more than suitable candidate to adapt the film.

Likewise, the novel would seem fertile ground for this particular filmmaker. Ramsay's approach to the novel may even seem uncannily similar to Morvern's method of story telling. Although Ramsay appears to be meticulously adhering to the book throughout the opening of the film, as the plot progresses, the director digresses, getting lost in the detail of the Spanish countryside and the narrative's poignant visual images. Various details surrounding the storage of her partner's body, much of Morvern's encounters with religion, her relationship with her foster-dad and his girlfriend V the D (a.k.a. Vanessa the Depressor), and several episodes are omitted such as Morvern and Lanna's fight in the airport, and others, such as the lengthy camping passage, are reduced to montage sequences. Just as Morvern favours the meticulous description of an insect, Ramsay opts to emphasise the visual motifs of the plot, leaving behind several other narrative events or characters. Especially towards the close of the film, several focal points of the novel are discarded altogether.

The ending of the novel, which sees Morvern returning to Oban pregnant, having run off to Spain again after Lanna paired off with her foster-dad, is entirely rewritten and is most likely omitted from the film version to promote a sense of unbreakable sisterhood between the two. This is probably the case too with the episode in the novel in which Morvern

leaves Lanna in the hotel room after finding her in bed with a guy taking ecstasy, to venture out on her own. In the film, Lanna and Morvern leave together in a celebratory sequence showing the two of them being driven through the countryside. This surreally depicted taxi journey is forced to end when it meets a village procession. The scene recalls, probably not by accident, the moment in Roberto Rossellini's *Voyage to Italy* (1953) serving as a psychological mediation on the disintegration of a marriage in which the taxi of the estranged couple is forced to a halt, and they have no choice but to step out in the midst of the religious celebration.

The almost script-like directions Morvern offers in detached fashion to her readers is frequently taken up by Ramsay. Morvern's thorough detailing of events as everyday as shaving her legs or showering, is given close attention.<sup>31</sup> She is like a camera, seemingly unlikely to omit any visual detail. This desire to visualise and communicate her external environment is also evidenced in illustrations throughout the text (these occur more frequently in *These Demented Lands*). What we are not privy to, however, is what Morvern is feeling. The horrid act of dismembering her dead partner is portrayed in a cool, dispassionate manner. Even the glass of Remy Martin that Morvern chases a pill with is part of the film's depiction. Brightly coloured swimming goggles that 'helped take away the reality of what you were up to' (p. 81) in the novel, brilliantly adorn the screen. Even her period pains, and her perception of her menstrual blood mingling with the corpse's as she hacks up her dead boyfriend, are evoked through the way in which the scene opens. The spectator first encounters Morvern, stooped over the tub, one leg hoisted up over the edge, with blood squirting everywhere. For the first few moments, you might believe it to be a rather mundane portrait of a feminine ritual, perhaps she has cut herself shaving. The innocuous melody of the Velvet Underground's 'I'm Sticking With You' would hardly have

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<sup>31</sup> Just to give one example, in a passage which didn't make it into Ramsay's film, Morvern showers at her father's and recounts it in detail: 'I used Red Hanna's razors and shaving foam on my legs. On top of the spray can the words Good Morning were round the rim in all different languages. I had a shower then helped myself to plenty of V the D's talc and moisturiser, putting it here and there. I got into the new short summer dress not bothering with the basque or anything on my feet' (p. 47).

you believe that what we will discover in the next beat is something far more sinister, as we are first alarmed by her vigorous sawing movements that the soundtrack was cleverly masking.

In many ways Morvern's photographic account of the details surrounding her external environment, coupled with her unwillingness to voice her internal emotions, would seem to make this particular novel quite easily translatable to film. Morvern never stops to analyse – herself, others, her actions or environment. A condition that often demands the use of voice-over in adaptations. Nevertheless, Ramsay, who from the start did not want to employ a voice-over,<sup>32</sup> didn't have to worry about voicing the internal. On the contrary, Ramsay is said to have considered keeping the film entirely devoid of any dialogue.<sup>33</sup> In writing the novel, Warner has explained his intention to tell the story as not simply realist, but with 'the quality of myth'. He explains that Morvern is 'naturally silent and doesn't talk much by her own nature, like in tragedy, she determines the nature of her own tragedy'.<sup>34</sup> In Warner's novel even Morvern's name is a signal of the mythic quality the author is intent on portraying. Upon her arrival in Spain, the courier explains to Morvern that her name is a local word meaning 'silence, to say nothing' (p. 125). And although the novel consists of very little dialogue between Morvern and other characters, Ramsay's film relies solely on the sparse dialogue and the affecting use of sound. Passages from the book such as the camping sequence and the baking scene lose what little dialogue they contained when adapted into montage sequences relying on the soundtrack for added emphasis, at times appearing more akin to the music video than narrative cinema.

Ramsay's decision to cast Samantha Morton as the withdrawn Morvern is interesting in light of her Oscar winning performance playing a mute in Woody Allen's *Sweet and*

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<sup>32</sup> Denes, 'Girls' Secrets', p. 38.

<sup>33</sup> Maurer, 'Morvern Callar'.

<sup>34</sup> Sophy Dale, 'An Interview with Alan Warner', *Edinburgh Review*, no. 103, 2000, pp. 121-132: 129.

*Lowdown*. Her performance of a daughter's self-destructive handling of the trauma encountered with her mother's sudden death from cancer in *Under the Skin* (Carine Adler, 1996) also bears several resemblances to her taciturn delivery as Morvern. Ramsay claims to have cast Morton on the basis of a photograph and claims that although she had seen her in *Under the Skin*, she did not recognise her at the time of casting.<sup>35</sup> Alan Warner, highly approving of Ramsay's casting choice, has said 'Sam is Morvern in every sense.'<sup>36</sup> Many scenes seem as if they would rather call on a series of montage shots, lingering on Morton's emotionless face and drawing from her presence on screen, before resorting to dialogue.

### *The devil in the detail of the local*

In a special issue of *Edinburgh Review* on Tom Leonard, in an essay titled 'On Reclaiming the Local and The Theory of the Magic Thing', the poet himself reflects on the politics of language. Leonard writes:

I think that in Britain the dominant literary tradition still 'taught' in educational institutions has been established by clearing the streets in this manner. A dominant value-system has been allowed to marginalize that which does not correspond to it, declaring it deviant and therefore invalid. It has been able to do so by the method of making the mode of expression of these dominant values literally synonymous with 'objectivity'.<sup>37</sup>

Leonard's positing of the local, reaching beyond accent points to a wider conception of culture and authority. Although both Warner and Ramsay seem convinced of Morton's ability to capture Morvern on screen, one aspect of Morton's performance has been questioned if not criticised, and that is the translation of Morvern into an English character. Although it was rumoured Morton could not carry off an Oban accent, Ramsay has explained the shift in character to mark Morvern as an outsider in the highland community, which makes her shift, midway through the film, to being an outsider in Spain less jarring

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<sup>35</sup> Lynne Ramsay, 'From Oban to Cannes', *The Observer (Review)*, 6 October 2002, p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> Sean O'Hagan, 'A Blonde With Lots of Bottle', *The Observer*, 30 June 2002, Arts section, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Tom Leonard, 'On Reclaiming the Local and The Theory of the Magic Thing', *Edinburgh Review*, 77, 1987, pp. 40-47: 43.



(i.e. she is still an outsider, only in a different place). As one reviewer explained, her switch to an English character 'makes Morvern even more of a free-floating individual, adding poignancy to the superbly realised friendship between her and local girl Lanna'.<sup>38</sup> The 'local girl' Lanna is played by ex-gentleman's barber, Kathleen McDermott, who was discovered shopping on Argyle street in Glasgow by a casting scout for the film. The contrast between the local non-actor and Hollywood megastar is interesting but possibly worrisome. Although the casting of non-professional actors is no new invention, the casting of only one for 'local flavour' is problematic. Even if Morvern is merely being carved out as an outsider, or somehow different, we must ask why.

One reviewer critically remarked that 'the decision to change Morvern's character from Scottish to English is inexplicable. The novel's point is that Morvern is so transformed by her experience she can escape her existence. But by being English and in Scotland, she is implicitly portrayed to be someone who has already arrived from somewhere else'.<sup>39</sup> The shift requires that Lanna serve as the mouthpiece for Warner's Scots tone, and an outlet for the local, a local that the viewer accesses only at a distance through the central protagonist's relationship with that character. Even if Morvern was slightly altered only because Morton was unable to deliver the accent, it is not certain whether or not the change eliminates a crucial aspect of Morvern's character.

Lanna's link to the local partially restores some of the specificities of the local lost in the process of adaptation. Morvern's obsession with list making, recounting of minute detail, and Morvern and her friend's exhaustive role call of inventive names for the community firmly locate the novel in the particular. Several of the places, such as the Mantrap, the Kale Onion, Jacob's Ladder, or the Politician and characters themselves, such as her foster-dad's girlfriend - Vanessa the Depressor, Tequila Sheila, Smugslug, Creeping Jesus, Sea

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<sup>38</sup> Nick James, 'Morvern Callar', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 12, no. 7, 2002, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Maurer, 'Morvern Callar'.

Cow, Smiler, the Bog Creeper (toilet attendant), The Slab (the bouncer at the Mantrap), fail to make it to the screen, much less their resourceful names. Douglas Gifford has explained the importance of the use of nicknames in Scottish literature:

but the truth of actual Highland communities is that they are packed with absurdly and vividly nicknamed characters, often disillusioned refugees from cities and the south, and living grotesquely alternative lifestyles in curious conjunction - and even atonal harmony - with the relics of older and traditional Celtic civilisation.<sup>40</sup>

Here Gifford explains the presence of nicknames as evidence of a cultural faultline, awkwardly straddling the reality of the present and a mythological past, but nonetheless an identifiable marker of the highland community. Even if it should not seem entirely necessary to retain such a small point of Warner's narrative style, like Sellar's mythological landscape of *Venus Peter*, accused of 'eroding the local specificity of the narrative', Ramsay's portrayal of the highland community lacks this same sort of specificity. The atmospheric, cold-infused environment, in which we first encounter Morvern, seems more mythological than local. Lanna appears to be the primary indicator that the setting is Scotland, but even so, the particularity of the Oban port is avoided altogether. Alan Warner has said 'the nicknames of the people in town – Tequila Sheila, the Argonaut – are the manifestations of a very strong and confident culture'.<sup>41</sup> In this regard, rather than interpret Ramsay's omissions as a lack of confidence in the culture of community within the film, it more accurately stems from the general lack of confidence in the industry from which the film originates. To further illustrate this point, we might think of Simon – Sick Boy – Williamson, in Welsh's follow-up to *Trainspotting*, *Porno* (2002), now ready to pave the way for a new 'European' Leith, cringing at even the anticipation of the utterance of his old nickname. In this scenario, the rooting in the local is negatively portrayed in conflict with a progressive Scotland, and Ramsay's erosion of the specific and the local

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<sup>40</sup> Gifford, 'Ambiguities and Ironies', p. 4. (Also cited by Cristie L. March in her *Rewriting Scotland: Welsh, McLean, Warner, Banks, Galloway and Kennedy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

<sup>41</sup> Dale, 'An Interview with Alan Warner', pp. 121-132.

could be viewed as a necessary sacrifice for its radical broadening conceptions of Scottishness.

*'It's really beautiful when you get to the quiet bits: I like the ants.'*

In the satirical sequence involving the London agents, in a style far more grand than Warner's novel, the two agents whiz off to Spain in search of Morvern's signature on their two-book deal, in exchange for an unheard of sum of money for a first-time novelist. When they ask the enigmatic writer about her next novel and what she likes best about Spain she enigmatically replies that she likes it 'when you get to the quiet bits' but most of all she likes 'the ants'. Morvern's unlikely response highlights Ramsay's own approach involving a poetic lack of dialogue, emphasizing other aspects of the soundtrack, but also a focus on other forms of specificity in Warner's narrative in which 'Warner makes Morvern alive to physical detail, textures, weather'.<sup>42</sup> Morvern's narrative often describes events, people, place and things in forensic detail. Rather than driven by dialogue the narrative progresses in a format reflecting Morvern's stream of consciousness, its focus shifting with Morvern's attention. Ramsay, well-equipped to portray the detail and specificity of location, shares an inarticulacy that expresses itself in visual detail. This was apparent with Ramsay's earlier films. In *Ratcatcher* her thoughtful close-ups of knees, ripped stockings, net curtains, etc., earned her the praise that the film 'makes you see the world with bigger eyes, revealing the layers beneath every surface'.<sup>43</sup> Her reputation for gritty detail suggests it is likely that the many layers of the local in Morvern were not to be left behind.

Then again, the absence of the specificity of the local opens up the text in the same fashion that Morvern's own silences and bouts of withholding her own emotions in the novel, produces an ambivalent effect that ensures Morvern's identity is never fixed nor

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<sup>42</sup> Gifford, Dunnigan, and MacGillivray, *Scottish Literature*, p. 948.

<sup>43</sup> Charlotte O'Sullivan, 'Ratcatcher', *Sight and Sound*, November 1999, review archive, [www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/reviews/details.php?id+243..](http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/reviews/details.php?id+243..)

constrained by the judgements of the reader. Morvern's powerful appropriation of silence over the conventional mode of narration, becomes in Ramsay's film, the valuing of seemingly abstract visual detail over the conventional narrative cinema's rigid adherence to plot structure as the central function of storytelling.

In an article on *The Shipping News*, Rachel Seiffert refers to the silences of Proulx's novel as having

the effect of always suggesting something further. The small, poignant, painful and funny details that are revealed are always suggestive of much that remains hidden. I am invited to share in some of Agnis' present and past, but she is always also more than this, and therefore irreducible to this.<sup>44</sup>

Like Agnis, Morvern's elliptical narration, in which she effectively controls and withholds often crucial aspects of the narration, resists reductive categorisation. We are never privy to the true motivation of Morvern, but in reality that would be impossible. Instead, we are only allowed to surmise without passing judgement. Even the words framing her silences are words which Morvern has adapted for her own use - creative variations, perhaps reflecting a mode of speech in Oban, but more often the case, further evidence of Morvern's resistance to the constraints of language. In line with Seiffert's praise of Proulx's narration, Warner's evocations of silence are representative of empowerment, overturning the disempowerment often associated with the inarticulate.

The crickets, cicadas, midges and other insects in Warner's novel manifest themselves as ants and worms crawling across the screen of *Morvern Callar*. Bugs are everywhere, even infesting a carrot at the hyper-clean supermarket where Morvern works. In the desert in Spain, they bite at Lanna's leg, who proclaims 'This place is crawling!' Certainly the film is crawling. In many instances, the bugs provide a moment of pause in the narrative, but also for Morvern. The spectator is urged to draw comparisons when Morvern, returning to work leaving her boyfriend's body back at the apartment, examines the struggle of a worm

boring through a carrot. In Spain, it is the cockroach scuttling across the hotel floor that intrigues her, and urges her to follow it to a stranger's room. And it is also in Spain that we see a group of boys making a game of several bugs.

Often shot in extreme close-up as objects of intrigue and beauty, insects are also framed in contrast to Morvern's vividly painted nails. Morvern first paints her nails almost in defiance of the body on the floor, determined to go out with Lanna anyway. Her red nails are frequently in focus as she taps away at the keyboard, replacing her name with her partner's on the first page of the novel. The camera captures her hand held out steadily before her, examining a job well done. In the burial sequence the shot ends almost as punctuation, with Morvern cleansing her hands, her hand again stretched out, suspended in the water mingled with worms. Again, in Spain, Morvern's hand is shot inching through the earth, steady as several ants clamber over it. Contrastingly, in a passage in the novel when Lanna and Morvern partake in a spot of baking, Lanna points out to Morvern that her hands are shaking. Morvern's hands are registers of Morvern's internal terrain, but also, as Linda Williams has pointed out, they are markers of the change in her physical environment.<sup>45</sup> Contrasting the instance in which Morvern examines her hand foregrounded in the cold Scottish flat with the moment she performs a similar gesture in Spain, Williams notes the interchangeable surroundings as evidence of Morvern's own sense of empowerment at her ability to change her destiny.

This other form of specificity draws on various recurring objects and thematic images throughout the novel, such as the 'goldish lighter' given by her deceased boyfriend. It is interesting that one edition of *Morvern Callar* features a foot, freshly painted with red nail varnish, while another edition's entirely covered with the image of a packet of Silk Cuts brand cigarettes. As Morvern adopts a camera-like specificity in her description of

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<sup>44</sup> Rachel Seiffert, 'Inarticulacy, Identity and Silence: Annie Proulx's *The Shipping News*' *Textual Practice*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2003, pp. 511-525: 521.

<sup>45</sup> Williams, 'Escape Artist'.

everything, the camera in Ramsay's film adopts a method of specificity, of singling out certain thematic objects, in a fashion often associated with written narrative forms.

Besides a general use of the close-up, zeroing in on a particular object for the possibility of further reflection by the spectator, it is used to emulate the narrative pauses, in written narrative fiction, in which the progression of the plot is halted. Although film as a medium is often considered bound to time's progression, in *Morvern Callar*, Ramsay proves the camera can slow down the progression of the narrative to make room for reflection on narrative detail such as the frequent appearance of the lighter and the repetition of the cigarette brands (Silk Cut and Regal).

What might be lost in the local specificity tied to the language in Warner's novel is made up for in Ramsay's style of visual narration. Ramsay's frequent use of unmotivated close-ups shares an interest in the sinister elements lurking beneath the mundanity of the everyday with other contemporary directors such as David Lynch. The comparison between effects desired by both directors seems clear if we are to compare one of *Morvern Callar*'s earlier scenes in which the spectator is first introduced to Morvern's work-life, with the opening of Lynch's film *Blue Velvet* (1986).<sup>46</sup> Both directors introduce the spectator to the 'normality' of suburban life with slowed down sweeping tracking shots. Lynch's film launches us into the world of the American suburbs as the camera tracks through unreal hyper-coloured neighbourhoods where the grass is almost too green and the sky worryingly blue. Ramsay's camera moves through the fluorescently-lit, stark and sterile environment of the supermarket with a fluidity of movement simulating the glide of the shopping trolley, that is paralleled with the sweeping movement of a woman in a motorised cart gliding across the screen. Both director's treatments of the mundanity of suburbia are undercut with the irony of the melodic soundtracks. Lynch's sardonic use of the song 'Blue Velvet' serves as an ironic counterpoint, as does the orchestral score of Lee

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<sup>46</sup> For this connection I am indebted to Karen Lury. It was her detailed and insightful analysis of the opening sequence of Lynch's film, articulated in a lecture for an introductory film course at the University of Glasgow, for which I was a tutor, that enabled me to see the similarities.

Hazelwood's and Nancy Sinatra's hypnotic 'Velvet Morning' which Ramsay employs. But in contrast to Lynch's use of music, Ramsay's unconventional use emanates diegetically from Morvern's personal stereo. In both sequences, the dominance of the unmotivated close-ups of seemingly unimportant objects is characteristic of each director's visual style. Like Ramsay's scene focusing in on Morvern's sense of wonder over the infested carrot, here Lynch intercuts the sequence with a seemingly unrelated close-up shot of insects battling each other. This overall effect of the discordant images and sounds communicate the instability of the ordinary.

***Representing female sexuality: voyeurism and the scopophilic narrative***

Speaking of writing in general and men writing about women in particular, Janice Galloway remarks: 'It's a control freak's dream.' For Galloway writing is generally about control – controlling the characters, the place, and the action. But when specifically asked about her feelings of men writing about women, she is quick to point out this aspect of the writer's 'control' and the implications of a male writer's control over his female character. Nevertheless, she admits it is a feature of all writing, which cannot be avoided and therefore must be accepted. She explains:

Alan Warner's women for example. Never done fiddling with their stockings. Doesn't *invalidate* what else he's saying - of course not - but it does remind you Alan's doing the observing. Which he is. There's no invisible narrator - that's a fallacy. *Lassies in films* is another one - always taking their tops off to try another one on, checking their nipples are at the right angle before going off to the shops.<sup>47</sup>

In all fairness, Alan Warner's somewhat sexualised representation of young women can be compared to contemporary Scottish writers such as Laura Hird, whose hard-hitting novel, *Born Free* does not flinch from representing her young female character as a sexual being.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, we might draw the same connections from Zoë Strachan's *Negative*

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<sup>47</sup> March, 'Interview with Janice Galloway', p. 94.

<sup>48</sup> Laura Hird, *Born Free* (Edinburgh: Rebel Inc., 2000).

*Space*, a novel openly following the female character's sexual exploits and exploration.<sup>49</sup>

The sexual undertones of *Foreign Parts*, Galloway's own novel following the journey of two female friends on holiday in France, might be read this way if it were written by a man. While Galloway does not seem entirely convinced by the authenticity of Warner's depiction of the female psyche, it is interesting that she should compare it to mainstream cinema, an industry largely dominated by male directors. Could it be Alan Warner's representation of women is similar to the approach of a male director constructing the representation of a female protagonist?

Rather tellingly one critic was compelled to label the narrative as the 'Thelma and Louise for the chemical generation'.<sup>50</sup> The connections are there: two females journey out together – and maybe even like *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991), criticised for an ending which would rather kill off its characters than have the spectator assume some sort of loving relationship to ensue, *Morvern Callar* cuts their adventure short. In the novel, Lanna is paired off with Morvern's foster-dad. But what would the film version make of Warner's supposed alliances with mainstream cinema's representation of women? Would the adaptation of the novel adapt itself to the Hollywood female road movie? In some ways, yes. Their journey is depicted as a triumphant victory of the two against the rest of the unfair world. Their bonds are even further emphasised in the film, where Lanna plays even more of a role. In the novel, Lanna and Morvern are still not on speaking terms when they arrive independently of one another in Spain. Morvern also leaves the resort on her own, leaving Lanna to herself. It might also be suggested that visual references to cinematic 'heterosexual' couplings like *Voyage to Italy* may represent more than homage, and may in fact be an attempt at rewriting cinematic 'heterosexual' couplings. Yet this idea abruptly comes to a halt when Morvern leaves Lanna to strike out on her own, dedicating the remainder of the film to the sole focus on Morvern's personal journey. Although their

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<sup>49</sup> Zoë Strachan, *Negative Space* (London: Picador, 2002).

<sup>50</sup> Cooper, 'Perfect Vision', p. 38.



relationship is infused with sexual undertones in the novel, the film portrays their relations as far less sexually charged. Instead, of suggesting a lesbian relationship the film opts to present their bond as a powerful female friendship, more akin to a *Thelma and Louise*-style road trip. Where Warner writes Lanna and Morvern in the bath at Lanna's gran's whispering about their foursome the night before, Ramsay only vaguely hinting at the idea of a foursome reduces the episode to the briefest shot of the two in bed with another boy at a party, and offers a less sexually charged version more akin to the naive bathing scene in *Ratcatcher*. In this way, Morvern's sexual exploration is largely eliminated in the film.

Laura Mulvey, in her seminal essay on the male gaze in narrative cinema, refers to Freud's defining of 'scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze'.<sup>51</sup> In Cristie March's study of contemporary Scottish writing, she reads Alan Warner's representation of Morvern briefly through Mulvey's theory, aligning Warner's perspective of writing women with the male centred gaze of narrative cinema.<sup>52</sup> Mulvey's description of the gaze bears similarities with Galloway's description of the writer's relationship with the text. In fact, most of Warner's female-centred writing, criticised for its sexual fantasy, surrounds points at which the characters are made visible or involve acts of looking. In other words, Warner, the male writer, is watching (or fantasizing about watching) the characters.

In one particular passage in which Morvern masturbates, Warner writes, 'I let my hair touch the floor just as I made it happen, remembering' (p. 48). Apart from presenting a glamorised, filmic image, the detail of her hair touching the floor is interesting in its narrative representation of point-of-view. In this description, although it is written in the first person, we are viewing Morvern from a distanced, carefully framed perspective. It is not so much how she is feeling, but how she looks. Throughout the text there is a great

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<sup>51</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1975, pp. 6-18.

<sup>52</sup> March, 'The Islands of Alan Warner', *Rewriting Scotland*, pp. 62-80.

deal of focus on the depiction of Morvern's body (and occasionally Lanna's). Even Lanna sometimes serves as an additional layer of the voyeuristic narration, constantly licking her fingers and touching Morvern. In one particular passage, the act of looking is further emphasised: 'Every one was watching Lanna lick her fingers and roll the stocking back up my leg then me smiling and hooking the strap on the front and Lanna reaching behind' (p. 19). In some instances, Morvern's detailed description of others acting, or even watching may be a further reflection on the teenage obsession with outer appearances, or may be part and parcel of Morvern's meticulous detailing of events.

While it might seem logical to anticipate a female director's interpretation of the narrative to involve a feminist rereading, Ramsay's film, in true cinematic style, also focuses heavily on Morvern's body. In one particular sequence Morvern is listening to the cassette left to her by her partner, in the flat, shortly after finding him dead. She sits on a sofa painting her nails on the coffee table. A close-up of her painted toenails firmly rooted on the table slowly pans up her legs - so closely even the hairs on her legs are sharply in focus - the camera moves further up before completing the pan up the rest of her nearly bare body, landing on her blank, dazed expression. Here, the camera's steady focus on Morton's face pulls back to encompass a further fetishising of her entire body, but with the same cool detachment.

Ramsay's film stresses the detached manner of Morvern and her ability to remain, unaffected by her environment. She makes money from a book, and then disappears in the sunset of a rave. In Warner's book, she is a victim - she only gets 1000 pounds for the book, her agents are cokeheads who use her sexually, and she loses her job for not returning to work. Unwillingly she leaves Spain and returns to Oban, many years later, pregnant and presumably having blown the inheritance (forty-four grand) left to her. In the film, her actions seem unlikely to be related to any other force of circumstance and are only dictated by the dispassionate state induced by finding her partner's body. Even her anger at the revelation that Lanna had slept with her partner, which in the novel causes

them to fallout, causes very little disruption in the film. She could care less. When Lanna thinks she is angry with her, it is really only a look of shock across her face at reading the acceptance letter in her hand from the literary agent. Here Ramsay appears to be illustrating Warner's method of detached observation. For example, the traumatic finding of Morvern's partner, only generates this composed observation: 'He'd cut His throat with the knife. He'd near chopped off His hand with the meat cleaver. He couldnt object so I lit a Silk Cut. A sort of wave of something was going across me. There was fright but I'd day dreamed how I'd be' (p. 1).

From the opening of the film, Lynne Ramsay attempts to translate the narrative from the perspective of Morvern's traumatised daze. Ramsay opens with this particular passage, focusing closely on the feeling of light from the Christmas tree, as the credits flash on and off with light. In other sequences, such as the rave, the visual point-of-view is distinctly Morvern's, characterised by the many hand-held camera shots or the use of slow motion, giving Morvern's point-of-view the feeling of a well or tunnel. In the rave sequence in particular, even Morvern's drug-induced, altered state of consciousness is replicated through the soundtrack as the visual image wavers in and out of sync with Morvern's own voice.

Warner's apparent adherence to Freud's definition of 'scopophilia' (i.e. 'taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze') prompts comparison between the narrative point-of-view of the novel and the voyeuristic gaze of the cinema spectator. Just as Warner frames his character with the gaze of others, Ramsay appears to highlight the voyeuristic practices of the cinema by layering the frames through which we view the character, like a series of Chinese boxes. Warner, as described in the previous passage, emphasised the act of looking by employing a series of characters within the narrative whose function appears solely to bear witness and look at Morvern and Lanna. Ramsay also intriguingly depicts several such moments.

As part of the sequence in which Morvern is at a house rave, discordant shots of Morvern out by the loch, in the pitch black, lit only by the bright search light pointed directly at her by a man watching her on the boat, highlight her sense of performance as she lifts her skirt for him. Ramsay's brief inclusion of Warner's imagined character, Creeping Jesus (Morvern's boss), begins with a focus on Morvern working in the shop, unexplainably shot through dark coloured glass. This layering device, once revealed as representative of lecherous gaze of her boss from behind the store's one-way glass window, serves to further remind the spectator of their voyeuristic position. In the novel, Morvern is all too aware of her visibility: 'That fly devil Creeping Jesus would be in his office with the one-way glass. I knew he would be looking down at me through the mirrors' (p. 11). Ramsay further highlights the spectator's awareness of their intrusive gaze through the frequency with which she composes the shots through doorframes. When they first arrive in Spain, the initial shot of their room, is from outside, through a doorframe, with only Lanna's feet propped up on the desk, visible. Particularly in the flat, Ramsay utilizes the small spaces to emphasise the 'boxing in' of Morvern. The film's opening moments, shot from the position of the lounge through to the enclosed space of the kitchen, serve to frame various areas as stages for Morvern's performance. In the kitchen again, the baking scene with Lanna is beautifully shot from outside, contrasting the brightly lit kitchen in which they are busy throwing around flour, with the darkness of the lounge. In the bathroom, the door frame is similarly used, catching first Morvern's legs, before moving in closer to reveal her task at hand: the dismembering of her dead partner. Even in presumably large open spaces, such as the hilltop where Morvern disposes of the various body parts, Morvern is framed in rack focus through vertical reeds. In almost all of the above mentioned scenes, the music from the soundtrack seems to further abstract our relationship and distance to the characters.

Zoë Strachan concludes her essay, 'Queerspotting', with the verdict that although homosexuality might exist in the world of Warner and Welsh's fiction, they are 'nowhere

near being homosexual texts', and are often framed from a normative position of heterosexuality.<sup>53</sup> This is interesting, and constitutes a call for the queering of texts in Scottish fiction, in addition to the mere inclusion of homosexual characters. But what could the sort of queering of the text be that is being called for? Strachan even goes so far as to suggest that *Morvern Callar*, Warner's narrative criticised for its voyeuristic tendencies, goes some way to at least off-centring male centred narratives. But perhaps the film and the criticism garnered for its unsatisfactory ending (in regards to Hollywood narrative structure) signals a sort of queering of the text on Ramsay's behalf. After all, the predominant mode of narrative cinema, Hollywood, is probably more determined by a heterosexual narrative rubric (boy meets girl, etc.) than any other medium or genre. Rather than have the film ending as the novel with Morvern, pregnant and returned to the hometown she miraculously escaped, and restoring the narrative equilibrium, by leaving the spectator with a close-up image of Morvern, at a rave, smiling to the Mama and Papa's song, 'Dedicated to the One I Love', Ramsay leaves the text open to Morvern.

***Morvern's space, rave and redemption: soundtrack and POV***

The soundtrack ultimately belongs to Morvern, representing her point-of-view more than the visual image. Even the soundtrack's moments of silence also seem to internalise the narration to Morvern. For example, with a little help from the image, in a scene at the resort in Spain, after Morvern has had sex with her hotel neighbour, a close-up of Morvern's eyes, coupled with the complete silence of the soundtrack, momentarily reminds us of Morvern's perspective. There are other moments of silence such as when she is in the graveyard with the agents in Spain, or during the burial sequence, and also when she is in bed with Lanna after she has just told her she slept with her boyfriend. These moments of complete silence confirm the soundtrack as hers and generate some of the most poignant moments of the film.

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<sup>53</sup> Zoë Strachan, 'Queerspotting', *Spike Magazine*, [www.spikemagazine.com/0599queerspotting.htm](http://www.spikemagazine.com/0599queerspotting.htm), n. page.

The clever device instigated by Warner's musical track listing in the novel demands the soundtrack's music to emanate diegetically, but often, even more subjectively, the soundtrack is sourced from Morvern's own selection of music as played by her personal stereo. The soundtrack, including songs from 'Ween', 'Can', 'Boards of Canada', 'The Aphex Twin', and 'The Velvet Underground', is representative of, but not the same as, the eclectic sort of listings Morvern offers the novel's readers. In many instances, as it has been illustrated in the previous section, when the visuals seem distinctly outside of Morvern's point-of-view, the soundtrack often rescues it. For example, when Morvern dismembers her boyfriend's body in the bath, Ramsay's characteristic visuals emphasising the spectator's sense of voyeurism insist she is viewed within the frame of the door and block any feelings of immediacy with Morvern. Here Morvern's point-of-view is redeemed in the sound-track's 'I'm Sticking With You', a track we are only privy to because of the personal stereo strapped to Morvern's waist. This certainly affords the spectator a glimpse into Morvern's world, but perhaps it only further emphasises her isolation.

The personal connection between Morvern and the music is even carried over into the rave scenes, emphasising its independent exploration over the collective nature of the rave. Rather than associate the dominant music of soundtrack with the club scenes, the loud techno tracks are often linked to Morvern's often expressionless face, emphasising her isolation like the role of music throughout. It seems fitting that the film ends with a close-up depicting Morvern's smiling face bathed in the rave's pulsating reflections of light alongside high-volumed music that slowly fades into a faint tinny sound generally associated with overhearing someone else's personal stereo. It is at this point, it is suggested, that we exit her world.

In *The Acoustic Mirror* Kaja Silverman writes about the possibilities of mobilizing the feminine voice from its fixed position in narrative cinema. While on one hand Ramsay's decision might signify what Silverman points to as characteristic of Hollywood cinema (i.e. the fixed nature of the female voice in the diegetic narrative as opposed to the often

mobile masculine voice which assumes a position of authority speaking outside the narrative), instead of interpreting Ramsay's choice as silencing Morvern, her decision might reflect a complete silencing of this male-dominated voice prevalent in the history of filmmaking. Rather than assume the power and authority of a well established convention, Ramsay explores her own method of voice. Silverman's dismay at the cinema's treatment of the female subject, 'excluded from positions of discursive power both outside and inside the classic film diegesis', and ensuring 'she is confined not only to the safe place *of* the story, but to safe places *within* the story' is somewhat relieved in Ramsay's film.<sup>54</sup>

Morvern's soundtrack lies on the edges of both sides of the diegesis. Morvern's perspective encompassing the narration is made clear even in the film's ending. Like several instances throughout the film, Morvern is implicated in the construction of the musical soundtrack through the tracks she plays on her personal stereo. In this final sequence, focusing on Morvern's enigmatic expression through the flashing lights of a Rave, 'The Mamas and Papas' song 'Dedicated to the One I Love' starts out as possibly outside the diegesis, or maybe played at the Rave, but then fades into the sound of a distant personal stereo. The ability for Morvern's soundtrack to flit with ease between the narrative, insists a certain degree of power both inside and outside the diegesis, and ensures it is Morvern delivering the final meaning.

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<sup>54</sup> Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, p. 164.

## Conclusion

In the 1989 preface to *Determinations*, a Polygon project which included Beveridge and Turnbull's provocative volume *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture*, the series editor Cairns Craig insists that although the 1979 devolution referendum was unsuccessful, the disappointment meant that 'the 1980s proved to be one of the most productive and creative decades in Scotland this century—as though the energy that had failed to be harnessed by the politicians flowed into other channels'.<sup>1</sup> The wealth of material offered in the study of this period, and the corresponding literary boom in Ireland, bears witness to the edginess of Irish and Scottish cultural production – partition in Ireland, devolution in Scotland, etc. However, the scope of the research - limited to films and novels associated with the other medium and its small proportionate focal point - is only vaguely representative of the creative output in both Scotland and Ireland over the time period. According to Ellen-Raïssa Jackson: 'It is too early to say that the long-hoped for cultural revolution that would flow from devolution and self-determination has failed to materialize, but the impasse in the development of the national film industry is surely a bad sign.'<sup>2</sup> The demise of Film Four's production sector, which assisted in the production of several of the films discussed within this thesis, does not paint a brighter picture.<sup>3</sup> Although expressing concern for the lack of support offered to future filmmaking ventures, in the same breath critics are breathing sighs of relief for the simultaneous successes of filmmakers, Lynne Ramsay, Ken Loach, Marc Evans and Mike Leigh. While many have pointed to the significant economic failure of *Charlotte Gray* (Gillian Armstrong, 2001) in comparison to the economic returns of the low budget *Trainspotting*, even the most successful production companies have had

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<sup>1</sup> Cairns Craig, 'Series Preface', in *Determinations* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Jackson, 'Dislocating the Nation', p. 131.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed discussion of this see the *Sight and Sound* special issue on *British Cinema*, October 2002.



to endure their fair share of failures as well as successes. In Ireland, Seamus McSwiney has noted the shortcomings of a government backed indigenous film industry unable to recognise a winning project (this task he likens to deciding on a national football team), but the added emphasis is on the importance of development. He supports this argument by pointing to *My Left Foot*, a film arising out of a time when no support was provided, but which relied on 'expert intervention'.<sup>4</sup> Robert Quinn's *Dead Bodies* (2003), the first film produced from the new low budget initiatives offered by the Irish Film Board and shot entirely on digital video, may also represent a future way forward for filmmaking in Ireland. Scotland has also promoted the implementation of new technologies through its digital pilot scheme.<sup>5</sup> Although the re-establishment of the Irish Film Board in 1993 has had a positive effect on filmmaking in Ireland, worries over the elimination of tax based film incentives (what was section 35 – or what is now Section 481) suggest that such innovative funding approaches may need to continue if filmmaking in the Republic is to prosper.

One notable aspect of this thesis is the absence of women artists.<sup>6</sup> Apart from director Lynne Ramsay, no other women writers or directors are represented. Although the scope is limited to those involved in adaptation, it remains indicative of a relative absence of women in various creative sectors. Marilyn Reizbaum blames the low profile of women on the failure of the critics to adequately represent the full range of literature. In 'Canonical Double Cross: Scottish and Irish Women's Writing' she describes the double bind of women writers in Scotland and Ireland: 'while British anthologies often ignore Scottish and Irish authors, anthologies and critical works of Scottish and Irish writing

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<sup>4</sup> Seamus McSwiney, 'Bad Irish Films', *Film West*, no. 33, 1998, [www.iol.ie/~galfilm/filmwest/33badfilm.htm](http://www.iol.ie/~galfilm/filmwest/33badfilm.htm).

<sup>5</sup> David MacKenzie's *The Last Great Wilderness* (2002) is the first film that has been developed from this venture.

<sup>6</sup> One also might question the absence of Gaelic literature, or even more generally the language itself. Few feature films have been made in Gaelic. Mike Alexander's *As An Eilean* (1993) could be considered one exception. Duncan Petrie refers to it as a Gaelic language film probably because it is set within a Gaelic community, although much of the film is in English.

typically treat women writers with the same disregard'.<sup>7</sup> She further explains, 'The incentive to create a dialogue between "culture" and feminism is more likely to come from countries where there can be little complacency about cultural identity.'<sup>8</sup> Looking at the volume of inventive texts coming out of Ireland and Scotland in the present day and comparing that number with the mere handful of books dedicated to their study, it is no wonder important writers are overlooked. Although due critical attention is now given to important writers such as Janice Galloway, A.L. Kennedy, Eavan Boland, Liz Lochhead, it does not come close to matching what they have contributed. So even the new productive period entailing a rapid growth in creative sectors, brought on by a resurgence in cultural identity, may not spell good news for women artists. In film in particular, which has historically been dominated by male directors, this poses a problem. Like Reizbaum's decision to hold the literary critics responsible for the lack of visibility of women writers, Fidelma Farley acknowledges film criticism's history of banishing female directors into obscurity. The sole female directors of 1950s Britain, Muriel Box and Wendy Toye, Farley points out, are largely ignored by critics because of their mass-cultural associations as 'women's films'.<sup>9</sup> A similar sort of prejudice is clear in the pigeonholing of adaptations and other work by writers such as Maeve Binchy or Marian Keyes, or in the casual oversight of the work of women writers for television such as Janet Paisley<sup>10</sup> and Ann Marie Di Mambro,<sup>11</sup> due to their associations with the popular. Still, Ramsay's praise as 'British' cinema's great hope offers some promise. In Ireland, Pat Murphy's established

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<sup>7</sup> Marilyn Reizbaum, 'Canonical Double Cross: Scottish and Irish Women's Writing', in Karen R. Lawrence (ed.) *Decolonizing Tradition: New Views of Twentieth Century "British" Literary Canons* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), pp. 165-190, 166.

<sup>8</sup> Reizbaum, 'Canonical Double Cross', p. 166.

<sup>9</sup> Farley, *This Other Eden*, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> Paisley is a Scottish novelist who also writes for television. Currently she is a writer for BBC Scotland's *River City*.

<sup>11</sup> Di Mambro has written for *Casualty*, *Eastenders*, and *Holby City*.

career as a well-respected filmmaker,<sup>12</sup> Kirsten Sheridan's admired debut with *Disco Pigs*, in addition to the work of filmmakers such as Geraldine Creed<sup>13</sup> or Mary McGuckian,<sup>14</sup> seems hopeful. And certainly the increase in women writers from the 1980s suggest more film adaptations will follow. Liz Lochhead's play *Perfect Days* and A.L. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad* are both presently being turned into films. New writers such as Louise Welsh, author of *The Cutting Room*,<sup>15</sup> have been noted for their cinematic style.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Welsh's novel has been optioned by 4Way Pictures, who intend to produce the film with Robert Carlyle in the lead role as Rilke.

What each of the adaptations in this thesis have exposed, through their narrative transformations from page to screen, are the thorny workings of the mainstream film industry and its occasional tendency towards homogenisation. Both 'national' cinemas, developing from literary revivals have been seen to suffer from the loss of the local through the narrative transfer to mainstream cinema. This is a reality of the industry that can be plainly identified through the comparison of the films to their literary antecedents. It seems that regardless of a film's budget, the demands of commercial cinema must be grappled with at some point. Even considering the increasing technology which allows for films to be produced on minimal budgets, McArthur's idea of a 'poor cinema', in which 'cultural need' is prioritised over commercial benefits, seems unlikely. Likewise,

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<sup>12</sup> One might even argue that Murphy is no stranger to adaptation through her work on the literary biopic *Nora*, and the retelling of a series of journals, or diary, in *Anne Devlin* (Pat Murphy, 1984).

<sup>13</sup> *The Sun, the Moon and the Stars* (1996) and *Chaos* (2002).

<sup>14</sup> Her first feature *Words Upon the Window Pane* (1994) was an adaptation of W.B. Yeats' play. Her other features include *This is the Sea* (1998) and *Best* (2000). She is currently filming an adaptation of Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*.

<sup>15</sup> Louise Welsh, *The Cutting Room* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Marie Gunnarson, 'Debut Novels: Sweet Mysteries', *Msllexia*, no. 14, Summer/Autumn 2002, pp. 45-46. Gunnarson remarks of the book, how she 'wouldn't be altogether surprised to see as an adaptation for ITV next year'. This backhanded compliment brands the novel as suitable for ITV, a channel which, while it does produce interesting adaptations, is still vilified in comparison to Channel 4 or the BBC. Comments made by the BBC Acting Controller of Drama Commissioning, Pippa Harris, at the 'BBC Television Producer Briefing Day: Drama Session', sum up this attitude. Harris opens the discussion by warning the group of potential story pitchers that 'We're here today to

McLoone's vision of a Third cinema, wholly funded within Ireland, may seem attainable, but is complicated when issues of distribution are considered. However, as this study suggests, the sort of free exploration of identity on the page need not always be curtailed on screen.

Gerry Smyth commends Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* for its ability to 'bridge the gap between artistic and commercial considerations, challenging and destabilizing stereotypical assumptions about Ireland as fully as did Joyce,<sup>17</sup> but casting its message in a much more accessible, and it must be said, much more commercially successful medium'. Smyth compares *The Crying Game* with *The Butcher Boy*:

What characterizes each of these texts is a certain tangential trajectory to the narrative, which is all the more disturbing because of its uncanny invocation and simultaneous refusal of traditional narrative discourse. ... These are "difficult" texts, if you wish them so; at the same time, they are also highly enjoyable, narrative-led texts allowing multiple points of access in multiple consumption contexts.<sup>18</sup>

*The Butcher Boy* (and I would add *Trainspotting*, and *Morvern Callar*, among others) can be read on several levels. But rather than simplify their mode of representation, they insist on presenting the multi-faceted aspects of culture in enormous detail. This involves the employment of devices, explored throughout this thesis, which consciously break with the conventions of narrative cinema – a play on conventions which inevitably questions their relations to their correlative cultures (i.e. Britain, America, Europe). Other general references and appropriations of other cultures abound in the films, reflecting a concerted engagement with a reality Willy Maley describes as 'two countries marginalized by England [that] express themselves in three languages, with one eye on England and the

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fill you in on our development plans for the next year or so, to tell you what we've already got, what we'd like more of and, frankly what you can take to ITV!!!' .

<sup>17</sup> Declan Kiberd writes in his chapter 'James Joyce and Mythic Realism' in *Inventing Ireland: 'Ulysses*, judged in retrospect, is a prolonged farewell to written literature and a rejection of its attempts to colonize speech and thought' (p. 355).

<sup>18</sup> Gerry Smyth, 'Being Difficult: The Irish Writer in Britain', *Eire-Ireland*, vol. 31, nos. 3 & 4, 1996, pp. 41-57.

other on America'.<sup>19</sup> Rather than classify these instances of mimicry or ventriloquism as evidence of the 'colonisation' of other cultural formats, they might be read as testament to an inventive appropriation or an intervention which attempts to open up and question fixed notions of identity. To borrow Gilles Deleuze's term, 'to stutter', they 'invent a minor use of the major language'.<sup>20</sup> This could describe the literature upon which the films are based, but also the films' process of negotiation with the language of mainstream or established cinemas.

Ultimately, the adaptation's success as a valued cultural text depends largely on the stake in that culture held by the various bodies involved in the production. A novel which might in some regards be dictated by its own cultural milieu, and perhaps even that of its contemporary publishing environment, is still relatively free from external constraints. The production of a film on the other hand, influenced by many people, and often transnational bodies within the industry, does not have the same relative freedom. It is only to be expected then that in many cases the adaptations most successfully regarded as progressive, innovative representations of Scottishness or Irishness are as much a product of innovative funding as they are the outcome of the creative sources from which they stem. Yet, as a number of the texts dealt with in this thesis have demonstrated, it is possible for pioneering approaches to the conventions and constraints of mainstream cinema carve out their own niche for individual expression.

While the aim of this thesis has been to draw upon these new inventive texts and offer a comparative study between Irish and Scottish cinema, there is still more genuinely comparative work to be done. It is certain that more commonalities exist or will develop beyond the confines of this thesis. In 1999, Irish film critic Hugh Linehan drew

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<sup>19</sup> Willy Maley, 'Ireland, Verses, Scotland: Crossing the (English) Language Barrier', Glenda Norquay and Gerry Smyth (eds.), *Across the Margins: Cultural Identity and Change in the Atlantic Archipelago* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 13-30: 27.

<sup>20</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 107-108.

comparison between the two countries in order to provide a sort of measuring stick by which Irish cinema could be judged. He wrote:

it is instructive to compare Ireland with its close neighbour, Scotland, a country currently in the throes of constitutional change, but still part of the United Kingdom (for the moment). It is interesting that Ireland has yet to produce as compelling a metaphorical state-of-the-nation film as *Orphans* (Peter Mullan, 1998) or as commercially astute a piece of zeitgeist-tapping as *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996).<sup>21</sup>

Although this envy moves in both directions across the Irish sea, what Linehan's remark most interestingly highlights is the swiftness with which the industry changes. Only a few years later, Linehan's specific wish for Irish cinema has been interestingly challenged by a prominent figure associated with both of the 'Scottish' films Linehan refers to. Peter Mullan, writer and director of *Orphans*, who also appeared in *Trainspotting* as a character nicknamed Mother Superior – for the length of his habit, has recently written, directed and starred in the *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002), a film that perhaps come closer to the 'state-of-the-nation' film Linehan calls for. The film, jointly funded by Scottish Screen and Irish Film Board, is testament to the fact that cross-over and comparison exists in production and practice. The reality is that actors, directors, writers, and the industry in general, see the progressive links to be made. Instead of viewing the two cultural industries as distinct and separate entities, or worse, rivals,<sup>22</sup> a commitment to collaboration demonstrates a great deal is to be gained; now, the criticism need only catch-up.

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<sup>21</sup> Hugh Linehan, 'Myth, Mammon and Mediocrity: The Trouble with Recent Irish Cinema', *Cineaste*, vol. 24, no. 2-3, 1999, pp. 46-49: 47.

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Murray has explored this notion of 'rivalry' between the two industries in his paper on Mullan's film, 'Sibling Rivalry?: Contemporary Irish Cinemas in *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002)', *Irish Postgraduate Film Research Seminar*, Trinity College Dublin, 10-11 April, 2003.

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Kevin Williamson (ed.) *Children of Albion Rovers* (Edinburgh: Rebel Inc.(Canongate), 1996).

Kevin Williamson, 'The Ecstasy Interview - Irvine Welsh', *Rebel Inc. Magazine*, no. 4, 1993, pp. 1-13.

Robert P. Winston, 'Travellers and Tourists: Rules of Engagement in William McIlvanney's Detective Fiction', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, no. 32, 2001, pp. 117-131.

Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (London: Secker and Warburg (in association with the BFI), 1979).

Bari Wood, *Doll's Eyes* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1993).

Virginia Woolf, 'The Cinema', *Collected Essays*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), pp. 268-272.

Martin Wroe, 'Hard Drugs and Heroine Addiction', *The Observer*, 10 March 1996, pp. 13.

## Selected Filmography

*The Big Man* (1990). Production Company: STV and Palace Productions. Director: David Leland. Screenplay: Don MacPherson, adapted from the novel by William McIlvanney. Performers: Liam Neeson (Dan Scoular), Billy Connolly (Frankie), and Joanne Whalley (Beth Scoular).

*The Butcher Boy* (1997). PC: Butcher Boy Film, Geffen, and Warner Brothers. Dir: Neil Jordan. Sc: Neil Jordan and Patrick McCabe, adapted from the novel by Patrick McCabe. Perf: Eamonn Owens (Francie Brady), Fiona Shaw (Mrs Nugent), and Stephen Rea (Francie's Dad/Adult Francie).

*Cal* (1984). PC: Enigma, Goldcrest Films, and Warner Brothers. Dir: Pat O'Connor. Sc: Bernard MacLaverty, adapted from the novel by Bernard MacLaverty. Perf: John Lynch (Cal), Helen Mirren (Marcella), Donald McCann (Shamie), and Ray McAnally (Cyril Dunlop).

*The Commitments* (1991). PC: Beacon, Dirty Hands Productions, and First Film. Dir: Alan Parker. Sc: Dick Clement, Ian La Frenais, and Roddy Doyle, adapted from the novel by Roddy Doyle. Perf: Robert Arkins (Jimmy Rabbitte), Michael Aherne (Steve Clifford), Angeline Ball (Imelda Quirke), Maria Doyle Kennedy (Natalie Murphy), Bronagh Gallagher (Bernie McGloughlin), Felim Gormley (Dean Fay), Glen Hansard (Outspan Foster), Dick Massey (Billy Mooney), Johnny Murphy (Joey 'The Lips' Fagan), Kenneth McCluskey (Derek Scully), Andrew Strong (Deco Cuffe), and Colm Meaney (Jimmy Rabbitte, Sr).

*Dreaming* (1990). PC: BBC Scotland. Dir: Mike Alexander. Sc: adapted from the short story by William McIlvanney. Perf: Ewen Bremner (Sammy Nelson), Billy Connolly (as himself), and Ricky Ross/Deacon Blue (as themselves).

*Lamb* (1985). PC: Channel 4 and Flickers Limehouse. Director: Colin Gregg. Sc: Bernard MacLaverty, adapted from the novel by Bernard MacLaverty. Perf: Liam Neeson (Michael Lamb), Hugh O'Connor (Owen Kane), Frances Tomelty (Mrs Kane), and Ian Bannen (Brother Benedict).

*Morvern Callar* (2002). PC: Company Pictures. Dir: Lynne Ramsay. Sc: Liana Dognini and Lynne Ramsay, adapted from the novel by Alan Warner. Perf: Samantha Morton (Morvern Callar) and Kathleen McDermott (Lanna).

*My Left Foot* (1989). PC: Ferndale Films, RTE, and Granada. Dir: Jim Sheridan. Sc: Shane Connaughton and Jim Sheridan, adapted from the autobiography by Christy Brown. Perf: Daniel Day-Lewis (Christy Brown), Brenda Fricker (Mrs Brown), Ray McAnally (Mr Brown), and Fiona Shaw (Dr Eileen Cole).

*The Snapper* (1993). PC: BBC. Dir: Stephen Frears. Sc: Roddy Doyle, adapted from the novel by Roddy Doyle. Perf: Colm Meaney (Dessie Curley), Tina Kellegher (Sharon Curley), and Ruth McCabe (Kay Curley).

*Trainspotting* (1996). PC: Channel 4, Figment Films, and PolyGram. Dir: Danny Boyle. Sc: John Hodge, adapted from the novel by Irvine Welsh. Perf: Ewan McGregor (Renton), Ewen Bremner (Spud), Jonny Lee Miller (Simon), Kevin McKidd

(Tommy), Robert Carlyle (Begbie), Kelly Macdonald (Diane), and Peter Mullan (Swanney).

*The Van* (1996). PC: BBC, Beacon, and Deadly Films, Fox. Dir: Stephen Frears. Sc: Roddy Doyle, adapted from the novel by Roddy Doyle. Perf: Colm Meaney (Larry), Donald O'Kelly (Bimbo), Ger Ryan (Maggie), and Caroline Rothwell (Mary).

*Venus Peter* (1990). PC: BFI. Dir: Ian Sellar. Sc: Ian Sellar, adapted from the novel *A Twelvemonth and a Day* by Christopher Rush. Perf: George Anton (Billy) and Ray McAnally (Grandpa).